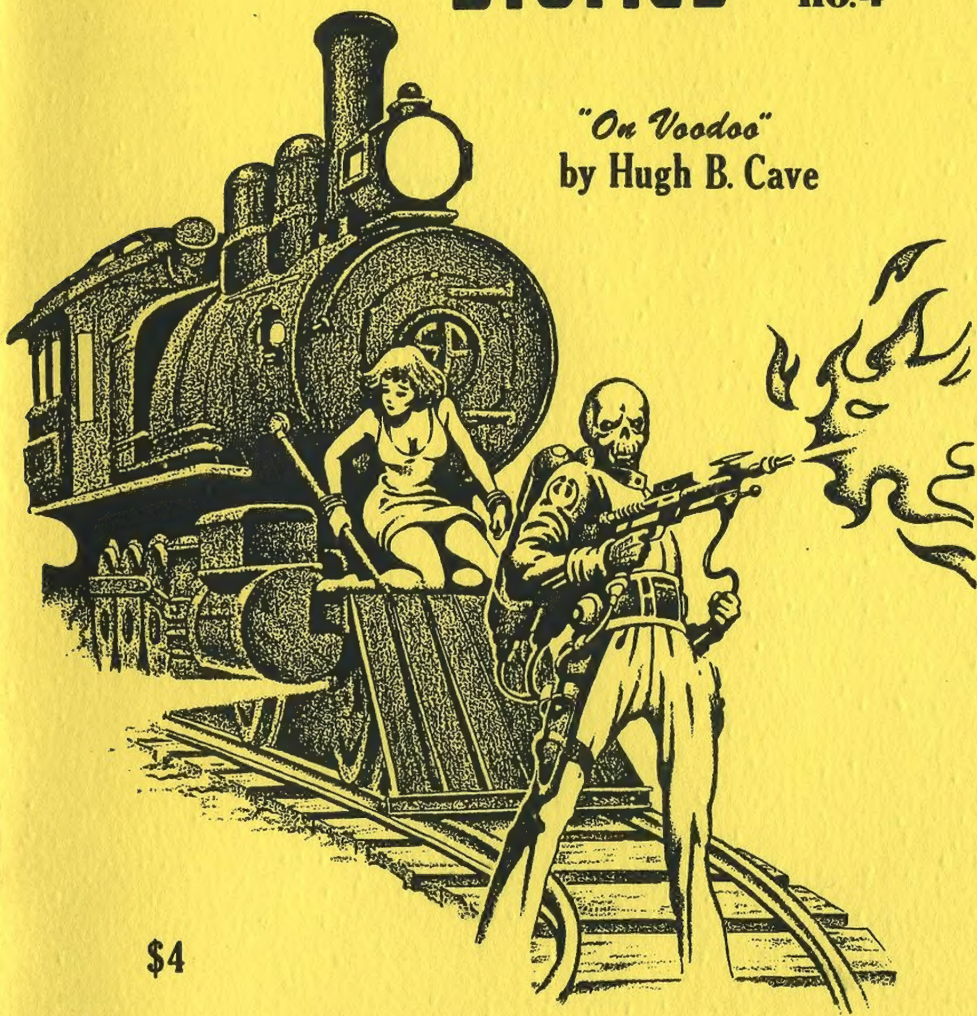


# SHUDDER

**Stories** no.4

*"On Voodoo"*  
by Hugh B. Cave



\$4

**"Rails of the Yellow Skull" by Carl Jacobi**





# SHUDDER

## Stories

March 1986

\*

Number Four

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# From the Secret Chamber

Welcome . . . hold down the screaming over there, will you? Welcome to *Shudder Stories* #4, which you should really feel pretty damned ashamed of yourself for reading. But since you've come this far, what the heck . . . We have another objectionable issue for you this time and it's probably a safe bet you're just perverted and depraved enough to enjoy it. How about our cover chiller, "Rails of the Yellow Skull" by Carl Jacobi? (Incidentally, a new bibliography of Jacobi is reviewed this issue in our new review column "Reviewer's Rack," elsewhere in this issue.)

Robert E. Howard just didn't write enough fiction, period, even though we have a whole shelf full, and he sure didn't write enough Weird Menace fiction. C. J. Henderson has tried to fill the gap by spinning out a new tale from a promising beginning made by Howard in the fragment that forms the start of "Dagon Manor." Here's a challenge for all you Howard fans: can you guess where Howard stops and Henderson begins? We don't

think it will be easy. You'll find the answer on the last page of the story, but don't peek!

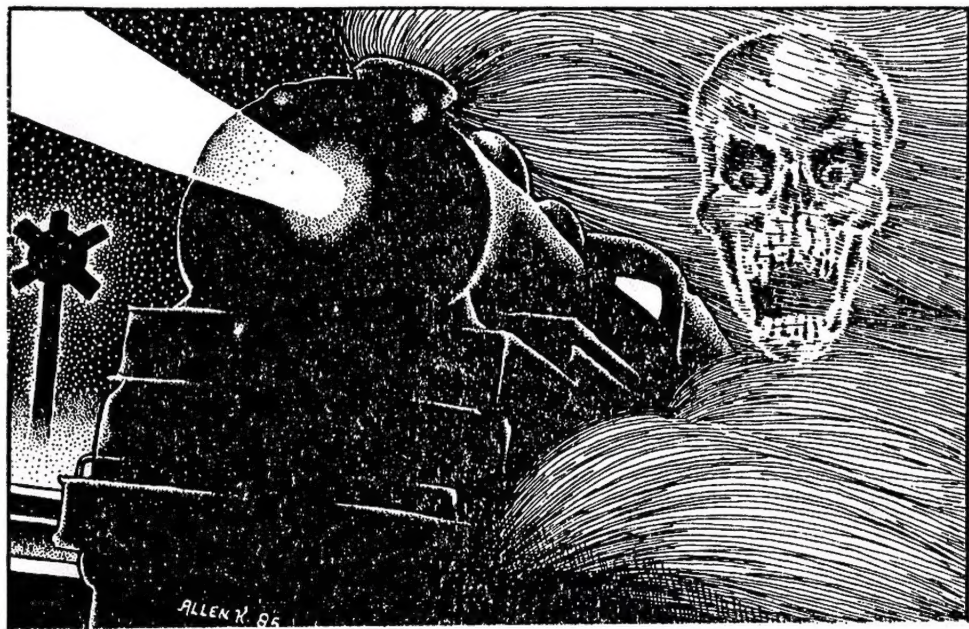
Excuse me a second . . . up it another notch, will you? Thanks!

It may come as a surprise to learn that new writers are continuing the Weird Menace tradition. Gary Lovisi has concocted "Satan Walks at Midnight," a new tale in the tried - and - true tradition. Hmmm . . . you've got to wonder what secret obsession motivates a guy like this, because there's sure no money in this field!

Put a spike in it, buddy! Some guy over here's asking where Hugh B. Cave is this issue. Patience! He's here all right, but this time with an article: "On Voodoo." How many times have you seen voodoo used in pulp fiction and horror films? And what do you really know about it? Cave knows plenty, having lived in the Caribbean and researched several nonfiction books on the region. In this article, Cave strips away all the myths about voodoo. Just pray you don't feel any sharp pains while you read it.

Robert M. Price  
Editor





## Rails of the Yellow Skull

by Carl Jacobi

There was thunder in the air as Frank North stepped into the smoky gloom of the Denver depot train shed. He guided the girl at his side through a crowd of disembarking passengers to the last coach of the Coast Express.

"This is it, darling," he said. "Brooks Delfield's private car. We ride in style tonight."

Madge Lane jerked nervously at the collar of her trim traveling suit. "I wish we weren't going, Frank. I . . . I wish we could stay here at least until tomorrow."

North nodded. Yesterday they had looked forward to taking this train. Tonight, with the trip changed from a carefree honeymoon to a serious business mission, death loomed before them.

Inside the private car a sweet, sickish odor assailed their nostrils. The smell of new varnish and new furnishings, perhaps, it made North clear his throat. He felt somehow as though he had entered a coffin—a coffin on wheels that was waiting to carry him to doom and destruction.

"Nerves," he growled. "Dammit, this thing is getting me down."

Two persons were in the car. Marc Delfield, hollow-cheeked son of the president of the Colorado, North & Western, leered back at them through horn-rimmed spectacles. At his side sat a smallish man with patent leather hair and a cream fedora hat.

"You're early," Marc said thickly. "The rest of the gang won't be here for fifteen minutes."

Unconsciously North felt a chill

course down his spine as he answered the second man's gaze. Armand Guise was the fawning suitor of Garnet Delfield, the president's daughter. There was something about the Frenchman's womanish face and beady eyes that reminded one of a harpy, poised, ready to strike.

Nodding and striding to the end of the car, North tossed down his pigskin bag.

"Can I get you something?"

Madge shook her head. "Frank, I'm afraid. I have a premonition something's going to happen this trip."

He smiled slowly. "Nothing's going to happen, sweetheart. You're tired, that's all."

But his voice sounded without emphasis. Even now he wasn't sure why he was here. He guessed, of course, that Brooks Delfield had decided at the last moment to look over that proposed right-of-way to Rock River, up near the Wyoming line. Information had come through that a government dam was to be erected there as part of a federal project. The influx of traffic which would follow would make the laying of trackage to the mountain town a worth-while investment.

As chief detective-investigator for the C.N.&W., North would be in charge of the policing of this spur construction-job. He had worked for the railroad for three years now. And during that time his friendship for Madge Lane, Delfield's private secretary, had grown into a deep love.

He drew a pipe from his pocket. "Going out for a smoke," he told Madge. "Back in a moment."

He paced down the aisle, swung open the rear door and stepped out on the observation platform. He wanted to be alone, to collect his black thoughts. Dropping into a chair, he lit his pipe and sucked smoke savagely.

The whole thing went back to those damnable cards. There had been ten

of them, and Madge Lane had found one each morning along with Delfield's mail it was her duty to open and sort. Ten postcards, grey in color, the address neatly typed, each bearing that design.

On the reverse side, like a macabre coat of arms, a death-head was engraved in yellow ink!

Delfield had sworn good-naturedly at first and muttered something about the work of a crank. But the cards kept coming.

Yesterday the routine was broken; two cards arrived. Madge had uttered a short, terrified cry as she saw that one was addressed to Frank North, the man she was going to marry.

Delfield's card bore writing this time. Above the death-head was scrawled:

YOU ARE THE FIRST. YOU HAVE FORTYEIGHT HOURS TO LIVE. THE YELLOW SKULL IS CLOSING IN ON YOU.

The president of the C.N.&W. was not a man to be frightened by unsigned correspondence. But he had turned the cards over to North.

"If there's something behind it," Delfield had said, "you figure it out. As a railroad bull, it may be a little out of your line, but you always did have a flair for things out of the ordinary."

The thunder was crashing louder now. North turned his gaze out over the train shed. Abruptly he stiffened.

Thirty feet away a baggage-cart was standing, piled high at one end with labeled trunks and gripsacks. A man, garbed in company overalls, was spraying that baggage with an automatic force-pump, shooting a thick mist out before him.

It was *Dustneer*, North's own invention, a chemical he had devised to protect the passengers' luggage from grime and grit while traveling. Only recently placed on the market, the product was already bringing him good returns.

But the man with the spray gun



didn't act like a company employee. He kept well to the side of the baggage cart. From time to time he looked furtively toward the depot proper.

Abruptly the man's head twisted about, and North's eyes jerked wide. He was gaping at a face that was a horrible expanse of featureless flesh. The eyes were black, oblong holes. A drooling hole, without lips or teeth, formed the mouth. The skin was wrinkled like parchment, colored a gleaming yellow.

The yellow skull! North jerked to his feet. Before he could throw himself over the railing to the platform a locomotive far down the track screeched its whistle. Simultaneously through the iron gate of the train shed a tall man with a cane appeared. Behind him came two other men and a young woman.

The figure with the spray gun leaped into action. Thrusting the nozzle up, he sent a jet of thick vapor shooting forward.

North, lunging forward, shrieked a warning: "Delfield! Look out!"

His words were drowned in an ear-searing hiss. Ahead a blinding sheet of flame appeared, issuing from the mouth of the spray gun. A river of red, that flame lashed across sixty feet of space toward the advancing railroad president.

In the split second before North reached the baggage cart, hell broke loose. He heard screams, terrified shouts. Then his outstretched hands reached one end of the cart. He vaulted over it and rammed into the overall-clad figure.

He sent a hard blow into the squat neck. A startled oath blasted from the skull-faced man's throat. With a snarl he swung, swiveling the flame gun. North grasped the man's wrists, fought to turn the liquid blaze aside.

There was but a split second to act. The detective lunged down, slammed headlong into his opponent's legs. The man reeled. The spray

gun shot from his hand and crashed to the platform. He twisted, raced for the depot.

"Stop him!" North, stumbling to his feet, kicked the flaming nozzle into the lower level between the tracks and lunged in pursuit. Ahead he saw horrified passengers open a lane before them.

"Stop him!"

The man with the skull face zig-zagged, ran in long leaping strides. He reached the gate, wheeled. Whipping out a revolver he sent three shots thundering through the train shed.

Something hot thudded into North's shoulder. He ran on faster. But when he reached the gate he saw only a huddle of paralyzed men and women. Madly he charged into the brighter light of the waiting room. At the street entrance he stopped, a moan of defeat on his lips.

The man with the yellow face had disappeared!

For two minutes North stood there, leaning weakly against the wall. A moment later he saw Conrad Kyle, the C.N.&W.'s construction engineer, approach.

"He got away," Kyle panted. "I chased him into the street. He vanished in thin air."

North nodded, swayed. Gripping the engineer's arm, he gasped, "Delfield! Was . . . was he hurt?"

Kyle shook his head. "Not a blister. All four of us—Delfield, the old man's daughter, Doctor Gage, and myself—would have been burned to a cinder if it hadn't been for you. But . . . by the Lord Harry, you've been shot! Come out here. I'll get Gage!"

Supported by Kyle, North let himself be guided back into the train shed. The pain had left his shoulder now, but his arm felt numb and feverish. His legs stumbled beneath him.

On the platform all was confusion. Passengers talked excitedly in strained voices. Two depot guards

fired a steady stream of questions.

And then North saw a blond figure run forward to throw herself in his arms.

"Oh, Frank, you've been hurt!"

He shook his head weakly. "It's nothing, Madge. I'll be all right."

Spots swirled before his eyes. Vaguely he felt supporting hands lift him, heard Doctor Gage, Delfield's physician, give a command.

Then blackness came, and he knew no more.

## Chapter II

### *The Voice of the Yellow Skull*

The steady staccato of the wheels over the rail joints was drumming in North's ears when he returned to consciousness. He was lying on a couch in Brooks Delfield's private car, and Madge Lane was bending over him.

"Frank"—her voice was filled with latent fear—"I saw it from the car. In heaven's name, what was it?"

For a moment he lay there, fighting to collect his strength. Abruptly he sat erect.

They were all there, standing in a huddled, terrified group. Brooks Delfield chewed a cold cigar savagely. Marc, his son, was pale and trembling. Garnet Delfield, the president's daughter, leaned against Armand Guise, her rouged cheeks glowing like fever-spots. Conrad Kyle, the company engineer, stood stiffly erect, staring like a man who did not believe what he had seen. Of them all, Doctor Gage seemed unmoved.

"You'll have to take it easy for a time," Doctor Gage warned. "That bullet went through the fleshy part of your arm, but it took quite a lot of blood."

North gnawed his lips. "That man," he said huskily, "used one of my *Dustneer* spray guns. But he had it filled with some inflammable chemical. When he ignited it, it changed

to a wall of flame. Practically the same as liquid fire used during the war. If he . . ."

"If you hadn't acted when you did," Brooks Delfield said, "we wouldn't be here now. We're grateful, North. I'll see that you're repaid for this."

North stepped forth unsteadily and peered out a window. The train was roaring through the night. Outside the bark of the locomotive's exhaust mingled with the snarl of thunder. Slanting rain swished through the panes.

"Where are we?" he demanded.

Delfield sank into a chair. "Somewhere between Bald Canyon and Deerhorn," he answered. "We stay with the Coast Express as far as Harmony. The local waits for us there, and we take a special engine to Benton. We'll spend the night in Benton. It's the nearest point on rails to Rock River."

The president of the C.N.&W. twisted about. "Have you found anything?" he asked. "Know what all this means, North?"

North frowned. "I haven't learned much. Those cards were mailed from different parts of the city. They bore no finger prints, and the addressing in each case was done by a different typewriter. I've got a man checking up on all engravings to see about that yellow skull. If he finds anything he'll wire me."

In the chair opposite, Madge Lane sat, hands opening and closing convulsively.

The roar of the storm and the clatter of the speeding train surged louder to drown further conversation. North swept his eyes across the car, scowled as his gaze centered on Armand Guise. The Frenchman, he knew, had a double reason in worming himself into the Delfield graces. He too was a construction engineer, with wide experience on the Continent. Disgraced in France because of faulty bridge planning, he had asked Delfield to place him in charge of the



proposed Rock River spur. So far the railroad president had refused.

As for Doctor Gage, North admitted he didn't like him either. He was hawk-featured, and there was an unmistakable leer in his eyes when he looked at Madge Lane.

A lull came momentarily in the storm. North stiffened, listening.

Then he relaxed, smiling grimly. He had heard only the wailing scream of the locomotive whistle.

But a moment later he was sitting rigid, staring at the varnished ceiling of the car. Vaguely he realized the others had sensed it too. A ninth presence was in the car. The air was suddenly thick with an aura of brooding evil.

North's eyes trailed across the ceiling, past two lighting fixtures to an oblong panel directly overhead. That panel was a ventilator opening, and the cover was ajar now, letting in a draft of air.

Stereoscopically, like a picture slowly brought into focus, something moved in that opening. And then Garnet Delfield threw back her head and uttered a jangling scream of terror.

"My God!" she gasped. "Look!"

It was a face, leering down at them, the face of a yellow skull, hideously without expression, without detail. The same face North had seen on the man with the spray gun. Then it was gone, leaving a blank square of onyx sky.

North lunged to his feet, raced for the rear door, and charged onto the platform. Cold rain slapped his face. The night was like pitch save for zig-zag lightning streaks that cut across the eastern sky.

By the light of those flashes he climbed over the rail, clawed for the grab-iron ladder that led to the top of the car.

On the roof he saw nothing. The wind shrieked at him, tore at his clothes. On hands and knees he crawled to the ventilator panel. A span of light filtered through the aperture. North peered inside,

braced himself as the train swung into a curve.

And suddenly from the blackness about him a sound rose over the roar. Low-pitched, it was a voice speaking in a low chanting cadence.

THIS IS THE YELLOW SKULL SPEAKING. I AM CLOSING IN ON YOU. THIS IS THE YELLOW SKULL SPEAKING. I AM CLOSING IN ON YOU . . .

Again and again the words were intoned. Abruptly the voice stopped. In its place, dying away into a hideous diminuendo, came a burst of savage laughter.

### Chapter III

#### A Scream in the Dark

A slow shudder swept over North. He remained rigid for a moment, then forced his way on past the ventilator panel to the end of the car. But he saw nothing. It was as if that voice had been carried by the wind. Only a dull patch of red broke the murk, the glow from the engine's fire box far ahead.

The train roared on westward. Telegraph poles like gaunt one-legged monsters raced by.

Clothing soaked, North retraced his steps. He had reached the ladder and was climbing down when the jolt came. There was the grinding of brake-shoes, the screech as couplings took up the play. The train was slowing down.

North swung onto the platform, wrenched open the door and re-entered the private car. Brooks Delfield turned to meet him.

"Why are we stopping here?" he demanded. "We're thirty miles between stations. We've got a meet order with the way freight at Solaris."

North scowled, made fists of his hands. "There must be something wrong in the cab. . . . Where's Guise?"

Garnet Delfield looked up languidly from a chair. "Armand and Marc went into the smoking car," she said.

"Mr. Kyle went with them."

There was a final jolt, and the train ground to a halt. Silence, broken only by the wail of the storm, swooped down upon the car. Stiffly North strode to the vestibule door, twisted the latch. His eyes widened.

"It's locked," he said dully.

Her composure vanished, Garnet Delfield pushed slowly out of her chair. Then North was shoving past them, pacing down the aisle to the rear door. Again a locked latch resisted his efforts.

"Frank"—Madge Lane came forward, swaying. "Frank, take me out of here. I'm . . . Oh God, I'm frightened."

He patted her shoulder gently. "Brace up, pal. After all, it takes human figures to lock a door, and if it's human we can fight it." He yanked open a wall cabinet, pulled out an emergency fire-ax. A glance at Brooks Delfield told him his proposed action had the president's consent. He raised the ax, swung.

With a splintering crash the door panel jerked outward. North reached through, twisted the knob, slammed the door wide.

An instant later he was running along the ties toward the front of the train. The wind howled, lashed at him like so many restraining hands. Save for a dim glow, the galley light in a dining car, the Pullman coaches were in darkness.

Midway past the fourth coach North drew up; in the gloom ahead heavy dragging footsteps grated. The advancing figure stopped, stood there in sinister silence.

Then lightning flashed, and Conrad Kyle strode forward. North gave a gasp of relief, yet even in the momentary light he could see the engineer's eyes were wide and gaping.

Kyle reached out, gripped North convulsively. "I was up forward in the cab," he whispered. "Good God, there's hell to pay there! The engineer's laid out cold, and the fireman . . ."

North stared at him. "Dead?"

Kyle nodded. "Decapitated."

Pandemonium broke loose as they stood there. Trainmen with lanterns ran back and forth in the darkness. The shrill, terrified voice of the conductor vibrated between bursts of thunder.

Abruptly North snapped harshly, "About this boy, Marc Delfield. Do you know of any bad feeling between him and his father?"

Conrad Kyle wiped a smear of sweat from his face, gave a hollow laugh. "Marc? You're crazy if you think that sap had anything to do with this. Delfield himself thinks the boy's a fool. When the old man dies, Garnet, the daughter, will be sole heir."

The detective nodded dully. "I'll take a look in the cab," he said. "You go back to the car, quiet the others." He moved on down the roadbed toward the front of the train. A brakeman rushed past him, yelling something. Opposite the tender, North suddenly halted dead in his tracks. Behind, hollow and muffled, a sound had risen up, wavering through the blackness.

Again it came, a woman's scream, laden with terror and agony.

Like a crazed man North wheeled, lunged back toward the private car. His legs seemed dead things holding him back.

He threw himself up the steps to the platform, ripped open the door. A harsh cry welled to his lips as he stared inward.

In the narrow aisle between the double row of easy chairs Brooks Delfield lay sprawled full length. His legs were doubled curiously upward. At the far end of the car Doctor Gage leaned weakly against a chair back. Across the physician Garnet Delfield stood like a propped-up image.

*But Madge Lane was gone!*



Chapter IV  
Death Pounds the Key

For the fifth time in twenty minutes the night operator at Caxton City paced to the door of his station and looked out. It was a dirty night. Thunder cannonaded in an opaque sky. Rain swept across the platform to drive against the drooling wall of the freight shed.

The operator lit a cigarette nervously. For more than an hour now, without reason, an inner feeling of unease had been slowly stealing over him.

He closed the door and went back to his chair. On the instrument desk a clock said 12:23. In twenty minutes the Eastbound way freight would be due at Solaris, thirty miles west on the canyon rim. The freight would wait there, giving right of track to the Coast Express.

A stronger gust of wind tore past the station with a sullen whine, and the operator shivered. A quarter of an hour snailed by. At 12:38 the train-wire sounder jumped into life for a brief moment. Hill Junction reported to the despatcher. The way freight was "by" there.

The clock on the desk ticked steadily. The operator paced across the room to a water-stand, spilled water in a glass. And then at 12:58 his every muscle became rigid.

The message-wire sounder suddenly broke into a chattering staccato. Hammering the familiar Caxton City call-letters, it vibrated over the roar of the storm, clamoring in insistence.

"CC—CC—CC—CC—CC"

Slowly the operator slid forward in his chair.

"CC—CC—CC"

There was something wrong. The call was unsigned. The touch to the brass was strange, different from any regular station along the line. Opening the switch, the operator reached for his key.

"I—I," he answered. "CC."

A moment's hesitation. Then in slow, jerky Morse the sounder began to spell out its message:

THIS IS THE YELLOW SKULL. YOUR HOUR IS AT HAND. WITHIN TEN MINUTES AFTER YOU READ THIS YOU WILL BE DEAD. TEN MINUTES! THIS IS THE YELLOW SKULL . . . THE YELLOW SKULL . . . THE YELLOW . . .

Like a man in a trance the operator stared down at the scrawled sentences he had automatically written. A hoarse dry laugh came to his lips. An instant later, he was pounding the key, demanding that the message be repeated.

But there was no reply. The operator kicked back his chair, groped to his feet. "The yellow skull," he muttered. "Am I going nuts . . .?"

Only the storm answered him, the thunder rumbling, the wind moaning like a creature in agony.

Sweat broke out on his forehead. He paced to the door, swung it open. For a long moment he stood there, staring out before him. Suddenly his eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom . . .

Ahead where the passing track merged with the main-line a switchlight shined vaguely. But that switchlight was no longer green. It was yellow, a gleaming yellow, and it was shaped like a human skull. The operator stiffened. His hands jerked upward.

Slowly the skull-light advanced toward him. Black cavernous eyes leered at him hypnotically. A gibbering laugh issued from formless lips.

A scream rose to the operator's lips. He clawed for the door. But with a final forward movement the yellow skull slithered across the intervening space and closed in.

*Chapter V*  
*Combat with the Monster*

In the private car of the Coast Express Frank North stood stunned. Vaguely he was aware of Conrad Kyle pushing through the door at his side, halting with a sucking inhalation of breath, then rushing forward to the prone figure of Brooks Delfield.

North clamped his jaws together and stumbled down the aisle to confront Doctor Gage.

"Miss Lane!" he demanded. "Where is she?"

The physician shuddered. "She's gone! Gone! It came and it took her. Oh God!"

"Gone where? Answer, damn you, or I'll . . ."

"The yellow skull. The thing wasn't human, I tell you."

Terror, like an icy hand, clutched at North. He turned, paraded stiffly down the aisle to the door. A moment later in the storm-swept darkness he was stumbling toward the front of the train.

"Madge!" he screamed. "Madge!"

The wind tore away his voice, swallowed it in a wail of mockery. Sobbing, he sloshed on. The train was a place of confusion now. Lights gleamed in windows. Passengers, clad in night attire, stood staring in vestibule doorways.

"Madge!"

Nothing. A trainman with a lantern lurched out of the gloom, strode past him.

And then abruptly North halted. Flanking the right-of-way here was a flat expanse of plain, strewn with massive rocks and boulders. In the lightning flash something black and indistinct was outlined, running away from the train.

North lunged forward. The rain had blurred his vision, but the electrical flare had been sufficient to reveal a girl's body thrown sack-like over the figure's shoulder. Leaping across a drainage ditch, North ran as he had never run before.

The figure was gaining. They plunged down a low incline, entered a shallow gully. And then suddenly the thing was down, stumbling, dropping its burden.

A driving juggernaut, North closed in. It was a fiend that turned to face him. Steel-like fingers clawed up, tore at his eyes. They exchanged blows. North rocked backward as a fist grounded into his abdomen. Back and forth they surged, pounding each other mercilessly.

And then the figure twisted free, bent down. It whipped something high over its head.

North sensed his danger a split second too late. A jagged rock hurtled through space to strike with sickening impact against his temple.

Blackness swooped down upon him, and he felt himself falling . . .

How long he lay there he didn't know. Even after consciousness returned, he gaped up into the gloom, physically unable to move. The rain revived him at last. Pawing erect, he stared frantically about him.

"Madge!"

He saw the girl stretched prone beside an outthrust of granite. He gathered her in his arms and stumbled back to the train.

The six others were all there as he entered the private car. Lowering the girl to the couch, he massaged her wrists, breathed a sigh of relief as she opened her eyes.

"It's gone, darling. You're all right now."

Slowly he stood up, surveyed the fear-stricken faces before him. Slumped in a chair, Brooks Delfield held a crimson handkerchief to a gash in his forehead. His face was taut, his lips quivering. Beside him stood his son, Marc, and his daughter, Garnet. Armand Guise and Doctor Gage were talking in low tones.

The conductor entered the car, strode forward to Delfield.

"We're ready to go on now, sir," he said. "One of the brakemen will



fire until we reach Solaris. I'll wire ahead for a new crew to meet us there when we reach Caxton City."

Delfield nodded silently. Two minutes later the train was once again boring into the night.

Abruptly North swung about, faced Conrad Kyle.

"We'd better make a thorough search of the train," he said to the engineer. "It won't do any good, but we . . . we can't stay here like rats in a cage without raising a finger."

Kyle's eyes showed too much white. He nodded and led the way through the vestibule door. Through five Pullmans they marched slowly, looking to either side, ready for instant action. The cars were silent, curtain-lined tunnels of gloom. The occupants had returned to their berths. They crossed a diner, entered more Pullmans.

At length they found themselves in the smoker. Here four men sat playing cards over an upturned suitcase. North gaped into their faces, turned away with a scowl. He paced to the far end of the car, yanked open the wash-room door, peered inside.

But their search was futile. Save for a black-faced porter who babbled hysterically to himself, they found nothing.

"No use, Kyle," North said finally. "We can't wake every person on the train and cross-examine them. We haven't the authority."

The engineer nodded. "I'll go back to the car," he said. "We're coming into a station in a moment."

Outside a green switchlight swirled by. Up ahead the whistle shrieked, and the train slowed to a rattling crawl. Hollowly the voice of the conductor sounded, "Caxton City, Caxton City."

North strode into the vestibule, waited until the train stopped, then swung down the steps. He crossed the little platform to the door of the station, pushed the barrier open. On

the threshold he froze rigid.

The Caxton City telegraph operator sat motionless in his chair. His hands were resting on the instrument desk before him; his eyes were opened wide.

A piece of wire had been lashed around the man's throat, twisted to cut off life from the body!

## *Chapter VI The Death Coach*

For two terror-ridden minutes North stood there. Then:

"Dead!" It was the conductor who had followed him to the door who spoke. "He's been murdered!"

North's fists clenched. "Murdered, yes!" He paced slowly across the room to the dead man's side, automatically dropped his hand downward and felt for a pulse. But life had left the operator long before.

Then North saw the paper. The pad containing the operator's last words before the horror had struck. Reading slowly, the detective went over each word, mouthing them aloud.

The yellow skull! With a hand that shook despite his efforts to control it, North began to search the station's interior. Unrewarded at the end of five minutes he turned to the waiting conductor.

"This is a matter for the police. Leave everything the way it stands and make a complete report when you reach Solaris. Now let's get out of here."

He placed the message in his pocket, strode across the room. On the platform again, he closed the station door, glanced toward the train. As he looked four persons descended the steps of the private car and advanced toward him.

North scowled as the leader, Marc Delfield, lurched within speaking distance. "Well," the detective demanded, "what's the idea?"

The road president's son sent a

furtive glance over his shoulder. "The idea is," he snarled, "we're leaving. Getting out of here, do you understand? We're going to wait for the local and go back to Denver."

Behind him, nodding in agreement, were Garnet Delfield, Armand Guise and Doctor Gage.

"Dad can be a stubborn fool, if he wants to," the president's daughter said. "He can go on in the face of death. We . . . I can't stand it."

For a moment North looked at them blankly. After what had happened, he didn't care much whether these four stayed on or not. Individually and collectively he disliked all of them. On the other hand he could not but admire Brooks Delfield, who, in spite of all odds, was determined to combat the unseen forces.

Suddenly a thought whipped the detective around.

"Madge! . . . Is she . . .?"

Doctor Gage nodded. "Back in the car, yes. She's all right."

The physician's voice was drowned in a sudden sound. Rising over the rumble of thunder came the grating of steel, the reap of flanges over rails. North wheeled.

He saw nothing for an instant. Then his muscles jerked rigid, and a wave of horror swept over him.

Ahead where the private car joined with the next coach of the train an aperture of yawning space was slowly widening. A steep downgrade descended to the east from the Caxton City station. Down that grade the private car was moving—alone! It had been uncoupled from the Coast Express and was rolling backward—without control!

North's body seemed clamped in a vice. Madge Lane was in that car! Even as he watched, the car trucks, feeling the effect of the grade, increased their speed.

The conductor's shout of warning snapped him into action. He sucked in his breath, hurtled forward. Across the platform he raced, onto the cinder roadbed. The car was mov-

ing faster, drawing away from him steadily. Suddenly from its interior a woman's scream tocsined out into the darkness.

Terror probing into him, North ran like a madman. He threw himself forward, clawed for the hand-rail by the steps. Breath burning down his lungs he clung there. Slowly he moved up the steps and pushed the door open.

He stood rigid.

He was gaping into the bore of a revolver. Inside a death-like figure stood, holding the weapon. The face was hidden by a low-hanging mask of yellow silk.

"So you are here, Frank North. Well, you have been expected. Your reception has been carefully planned for you."

North swayed. Five feet beyond he could see the motionless figure of Madge Lane, lying prone on the couch. In the chair opposite Brooks Delfield sat like a wooden image, hands lashed behind him, ankles securely bound. The road president's face was twisted in terror.

An icy chill shot over North as he looked at the figure in the mask. "Who . . . who are you?" he gasped.

"I am the yellow skull. I am he who is going to kill you."

As the figure spoke Madge Lane stirred on the couch.

"Oh, Frank!"

Mad fury seized North then. With a side-swiveling lunge he threw himself forward, clawed for the revolver. But he got only half way.

Like a cat the figure leaped back. It whipped forth a length of rope and sent a noose coiling forward. The thong dropped around the detective's throat, jerked tight. Strangling pressure jammed against his larynx.

An instant later he felt himself seized, flung backward to the car wall. When the pressure was eased, he was lashed helpless to a floor-bracketed chair.

The car was racing faster now. Over the howl of the storm the wheels rumbled and roared as they felt the



full effect of the downgrade. The figure in the mask uttered a low laugh.

"You are a fool, Frank North. Your heroics may be appreciated by your sweetheart here, but they will avail you nothing. In five minutes the car will reach the end of this downgrade. It will lessen its speed for a mile as it drifts along a straightaway. I plan to get off there.

"But five minutes after I have left the car it will enter the outer reaches of Deerhorn canyon. I think you know the rest. The grade there is even greater. And if the car does keep to the rails, there's another train, a freight, just beyond."

"But who—" A half-stifled moan welled to North's lips as he struggled frantically. "Who are you?"

"You will never know who I am. I am sending you to your death only because you have persisted in interfering with my plans. It is you"—the masked figure swung about to face the road president—"you, Brooks Delfield, that I want. With you dead the Colorado, North & Western will discard its plans to lay trackage to Rock River. That right-of-way is rightfully mine. I have planned such a project, dreamed about it for years."

Swaying with the movements of the car, the figure suddenly whipped about. Madge Lane had left the couch and was moving towards North's revolver on the floor of the car. The masked figure seized her, slapped its open fist into her face and flung her back on the couch.

North's brain spun as he watched. He tore at his bonds.

"For two years I have known the federal government planned to erect a dam to the Rock River site. There is only one passable right-of-way to the town, the one which the Colorado, North & Western plans to use. Do you think I intend to let a fortune slide between my fingers when it is so close?"

The figure glanced out the window. "We are approaching the straightaway. If you thought to stop the car after I get off, put it out of your mind. I shall damage the brake wheel beyond use."

He turned, strode down the aisle to the observation door. The car was plunging into the night like an insane thing now. Wheels over the fish-plates thundered a pounding death-dirge. Brooks Delfield sat like a man of stone, staring blankly before him.

And then hope swept through North. His hands, lashed tight to the arm of the chair, were but inches from his open vest. Across that vest stretched his watch-chain, and from one end of the chain hung a silver monogrammed pocket knife.

Twisting, North jammed his body sideways, reached for the chain, tore it loose. His fingers dug the knife blade open, began to saw at his hands.

Like members of another body his hands worked. And then . . .

The ropes parted! He lurched erect, raced down the aisle toward the masked figure still bent over the brake wheel on the observation platform. A hiss of surprise came from the figure's lips as it turned to meet the attack.

They struck. Fists pounding in and out, North fought to reach that yellow mask. The revolver was in the figure's hand now. North seized the gun wrist, sent the weapon clattering to the platform.

They stumbled to the rail. Cold hands clamped about North's throat, bent him slowly backward into space. He forced himself up, strove frantically to break that death grip.

And then he found an opening. The car shot into a curve, heeled to the tangent. Off-balance, the figure staggered back.

North slammed his right fist forward with every ounce of strength he possessed. The figure uttered a hollow cry, stiffened and slumped downward. The yellow mask was ripped

away, revealing a man's face in the light spilling out the car door.

*It was the face of Conrad Kyle!*

The events that followed remain in Frank North's brain only as a swirl of confusion. Moving as in some strange dream, he stopped the car—Kyle had only partially damaged the brake wheel—waited for what seemed interminable hours, and finally flagged the oncoming freight.

A long time later they arrived back at Caxton City. There they joined the Coast Express, continued to Solaris. And at Solaris police came aboard and took charge.

Conrad Kyle was completely broken in spirit as he saw the failure of his plans. Cross-questioned, he finally broke down and confessed.

It was a confession fantastic. Thirsting for more wealth he had in some way obtained advance information of the proposed federal dam and had foreseen the huge possibilities of railroad communication with the site. He had realized that if he could prevent the Colorado, North & Western from acting he could obtain an option on the property and sell for a high price to any of a dozen rival roads.

The rest was a matter of carefully laid plans. From the attempted mur-

der of Brooks Delfield in the Denver depot by means of the flame liquid in North's own *Dustneer* gun to the uncoupling of the private car at Caxton City, all had proceeded on a pre-arranged schedule. The mysterious voice which North had heard on the roof of the car was found to have come from a miniature phonograph, cleverly concealed in the ventilator opening. The yellow skull face that appeared in the aperture was a mask, worked by the same mechanism.

Kyle had accomplices to aid him. Underworld characters whom he knew from earlier contacts had tapped the telegraph wires, sent the mysterious messages, attempted to kidnap Madge Lane and killed the operator at Caxton City. The whole thing was worked out on a huge scale to prevent the slightest slip-up.

But now all that is past. The last spike has been driven on the Colorado, North & Western spur-track to Rock River. Frank North and Madge Lane are married and live in a small town near Denver.

Yet there are times when North is gone and the screech of an eastbound train wails up the valley that Madge stops and shudders. She still remembers the terror of that night on the Coast Express.





## DAGON MANOR

by Robert E. Howard and C. J. Henderson

When I lie dying I will remember my first view of Dagon Manor, the accursed. A cold grey sky arched above it where it loomed in the lonely desolation of the fens. Behind its sullen dark bulk the sombre crimson of the sunset throbbled upon the foothills.

On all sides the moors sloped away, dim and drear, the long sere grass rippling under a chill wind. And as far as we could see, there was no other sign of human habitation—only that somber unlighted house rearing stark against the cold solitude.

Conrad shivered involuntarily.

"What a desolate waste! Why should the man choose such an unholy spot for his habitation?"

"You should know Tavarel of old, Conrad. He was always a morose,

taciturn soul, something of the recluse, something of the misanthrope, something of the mystic. This dreary and lonely setting is just such as would appeal to him, since his heritage from his uncle has made him financially able to carry out his wildest whims. Look!"

A light had sprung up in the silent house.

The heavy, old-fashioned knocker resounded spectrally throughout the house. The heavy oaken door opened, and a familiar figure was framed in the dim light from within the great cavernous hall. The fellow was Ket-ric, Tavarel's single servant, a gaunt, silent cadaverous man whose past not even Tavarel knew. I never liked the fellow. There was something about his bare, high skull, his cold light eyes and thin hooded

nose which was unpleasantly reminiscent of a vulture or some foul bird of prey. And I knew Conrad shared this feeling.

Suddenly, I was again filled with the dread that had settled in me on our way to Tavarel's that evening. We had been hard pressed to find someone to take us from the main village to our host's estates. The only driver we could find with heart enough to transport us was a lumbering, superstitious oaf whose courage was half bluster and half alcohol.

He had whipped his sullen nags throughout the trip, spurring them with curse and lash, until finally in their maddash through the black night they bounced the fool's antique buggy one time too many. Conrad and I had been forced to walk the last pair of miles to Tavarel's, listening to the carriageman's foul curses behind us in the distance. His raging screeches haunted us for half of our march, filling me with a most irrational dread. Now, the sight of Ketric before me flushed my body with that same terror.

We had seen him last in Conrad's home, when he had "accidentally" struck his master's mutual friend, and ours, John O'Donnel, a near-crushing blow with an antique flint mallet. O'Donnel had appeared quite near to death after the blow, until he had come bolt upright and made to strangle Ketric. He would have succeeded as well, if the entire assembly had not been there to pull them apart. At the time, amid the pandemonium, I had not noted Ketric's look as unusual. He wore the same look now, and it chilled me through my soul like a look in a demon mirror.

Half-stumbling, I acknowledged the manservant, gripping my irrational fears and making bid to enter. Conrad followed close. None of us had seen Tavarel since he had left for England the year before to claim his inheritance. Now, we were inside the oppressive bulk, being ushered into its new lord's presence. Ketric

moved us into the main foyer, asking for our coats and wraps. Indicating a heavy dark wood door, he told us, "All the others are here."

With that, he turned from us, moving away to some room hidden from our view. Grasping the doorhandle, I pulled, allowing Conrad and myself to join a gathering quite well known to us. Tavarel, sitting at the head of a long oaken table, stood and bellowed, "Conrad! Kirowan! About time. The hour is almost high—what happened to the pair of you? No matter, though, no time now. Best now you take to the bar and fetch yourselves a stout bracer."

Waving his hands over the assembly, he urged, "Best we all find a fresh broth to warm our courage with."

Heeding our host's advice, those around the table advanced toward us and the bar beyond. Clemants joined the others by sweeping us forward with a shove at each of our backs. Like many another artist, his fierce struggles with poverty in his youth had lined his face beyond his years. He was a tall, lean man, usually silent to the point of taciturnity. That night was different, though.

"Well," he said, "are you ready for this night's adventure?"

As I poured myself a brandy, I confessed, "In all truth, neither Conrad nor I really know what is behind all this."

Clemants turned to Harris and Singer next to him at the bar. Singer confirmed, "Nor do any here, save our host and his servingman, apparently. I think Tavarel has relied on our own driving curiosities to drag us here to his doorstep."

"And who wouldn't have been curious with a message such as yours to greet us in the afternoon mail?" The speaker was O'Donnel. He was always the quickest to act amongst us. Standing from the table, he spoke evenly, but with a tone which meant his patience had ended. He pointed his finger at Tavarel.

"We are all of us, I am sure,



tired of waiting. You've put us off all evening, saying you wanted to await Conrad and Kirowan's arrival before you explained your message. Well, they're here. Forget drinks and your promised dinner, and the cigars and brandy to follow."

Reaching inside his jacket pocket, O'Donnel pulled forth a telegram I was sure was a mate to the ones Conrad and I had received. "You brought us here with these words:

OCTOBER THIRTY-FIRST I  
SHALL SLIDE THE BIT IN  
GOD'S MOUTH. JOIN ME.

TAVAREL

"Now I think you had better explain them."

Tavarel spread his large palms apart, gesturing acquiescence. Looking from one of our faces to another, he could see we all shared O'Donnel's enthusiasm to learn why we had gathered. Tavarel motioned us to the table, asking us to take seats. With strong drink in hand, Conrad and I joined the others as our host began his story.

"A number of people we have known, or known of, have lost their lives due to something none of us here has quite understood. Joseph Roelocke and John Grimlan were two. Conrad, your brother's 'suicide' was another. Hah; suicide indeed. We all know better than that."

Tavarel was correct. James Conrad had faced something nightmarish, and there was no doubt he had been shaken by it. I had been the only one of us in contact with James at the time of his death. He had been troubled; at moments he could appear nearly mad, but he was maddened with anger and shame. What had happened to him in that house in old Dutchtown, I would never be able to say, but I do know he returned to it to destroy it, not himself. The fact that his body had been found in the charred ruins proved suicide only to the local mayor and his sleepy fearful council, no one else. Tavarel continued:

"Justin Geoffrey, that poor lunatic, committed suicide—driven to it by the sight of a delirious dimension beyond ours. Geoffrey, like Conrad's brother, was given a glimpse of another world, an insane plane past logic or science or any other discipline we might choose to wrap ourselves within, and the sight of it made the crude normalities of our everyday existence too dry and laughable to bear."

Tavarel stood then, towering over the end of the table like some long-lost Celtic warchief. His eyes shone with a red hue glueing us to his every word. Pointing down the table past us all, through the doorway beyond, down through the floors, he told us, "In this place left in my care by great goddess Chance, there is a doorway to that other place; beneath us is a chamber which acts as a veil between our sphere of life and that other."

"Tonight, for those willing, there is a chance to tear back that veil. A chance to remove the barrier and for once allow men prepared to act to capture and slay whatever it is beyond, which has come here one time too many."

We all sat in shallow quiet, none daring to stir. Conrad and I had seen the demon-thing Tavarel spoke of when it had carried John Grimlan back beyond its dimensional drappings. We watched, frozen in horror as flames turned Grimlan's home into a crimson inferno with appalling swiftness. Our eyes did not seek the licking tongues consuming his home, however. We stared instead at a great mass swirling in the sky over us. A gigantic black shadow, like a monstrous bat, hovered above the holocaust. From its dark clutch a small white thing dangled limply; that the thing was John Grimlan neither Conrad nor I had ever doubted.

Conrad stared at me, and I knew that night was before his eyes. It had flashed into his brain at Tava-

rel's mention of Grimlan as had another night into O'Donnel's when our host had spoken the name of Joseph Roelocke.

I was with O'Donnel when the same kind of monstrous shadow claimed Roelocke, blotting him out in one brain-shattering instant. I took O'Donnel's arm and we fled the accursed chamber, blind with horror.

Looking at O'Donnel's face now, though, looking from it to Conrad's, to Clemants', to Tavarel's, to Beard-sley's and the others', I wondered if our host was not right, and that maybe it was indeed finally the time to act. It was only a matter of a few moments of discussion to discover that all our party felt the same.

Tavarel stood in the glow of the fireplace, shards of light glancing off his back. Though older by far than any present, his form radiated assurance and confidence to the rest of us. He was cut from the same cloth as O'Donnel; despite his age he was a fighting man, rough chopped from a solid block of muscle and determination that refused to acknowledge fear or defeat. He smiled at our acceptance of his mad defiance. And mad it was, for with scarcely a thought, the seven of us had determined to throw in with our old friend, determined to aid him in his attempt to destroy the thing which had so casually trampled through all our lives.

At Tavarel's request, we headed for the doorway, following him like schoolboys promised their first view of a lion. We were excited and yet apprehensive, for we knew the beast in question might easily reach out from its confines and snare us all for a savage repast.

Our host led us to the stairway descending to the manor's subterranean levels. Electric lantern in hand, Tavarel led the way into the infinite darkness stretching before us down the massive stone stairs. We stumbled along in single file, feeling the deep cold of the walls as we

fingered our way through the descent. Although the stairway was a short one, the darkness combined with our purpose to strike us all with dread. Even after Tavarel brought the electric lights into being, none of us spoke, or expected any other to speak.

We stared about the massive sub-room, taking its contents in at a glance. The only permanent fixture was a massive oil heater. Sitting in the corner, it made its own quiet noises, churning steam through its black grill and the pipes octopussing their way upward through the manor. Other than the furnace, however, the huge chamber was filled with nothing but war materials. Tavarel explained the stores as provisions left behind after the Great War.

Dagon Manor had been used as a storage center, the army reluctant to build a supply dump in such a remote outpost. Tavarel's uncle had volunteered the premises to the military, who had bunked fifty men in his halls and filled his cellar with powder, shells, machine oil and fuel. That the leaving of such supplies years after the war seemed most unorthodox, Tavarel agreed most vigorously. He said that the enlisted men stationed in his home had related many disturbing feelings and emotions, in both rumors and reports. There had been more than one argument amongst the soldiers that ended in blood-letting, and one murder that had never been solved.

The army abandoned the post as quickly as they could at the war's end, and no one had yet come to cart out the explosives, even though Tavarel's uncle had written about it more than once. It was not this our host wanted us to see, though. Leading us through the twisting maze of barrels, sacks and crates, Tavarel brought us to a large gash in the flagstones of the sub-chamber's floor.

Peering in, one could see a slope of packed dirt, falling away into blackness. Tavarel told us, "Ketric discovered this hole some months ago.



Apparently the flooring gave out one day and collapsed into the tunnel you can see below. That the manor is built atop these catacombs there is no record, at least not one I have been able to uncover. But they are here, and they are most extensive. Ketric and I have explored them, finding much that beggars description, and more which begs not to be mentioned. We also discovered the room to which I shall now take you."

So saying, our host grabbed hold of a support rope, previously strung and anchored, and began making his way to the floor of the tunnel below. One by one we followed, our nerves reaching out into the pitch around us, searching for the source of the fear snaking its way into our hearts.

As O'Donnell hit the floor, Tavarel had already powered the set of electric lights strung down the center of the cavern roof. "Had workmen put them in—damn cowards—charged me five times their worth, half the sluggards carrying guns and clubs the whole time, the other half warding bags and crucifixes, as if any of that could have stopped what was giving them the willies."

Tavarel spoke as he led us deeper into the tunnels. He estimated the fabulous age of the moss-clung walls around us, telling us the meaning of many of the hieroglyphs covering them. The chill of the subterranean passage crept into everyone, setting arms to slapping and teeth to chattering up and down our line. Before anyone made to complain, however, we arrived at our destination.

We came into a huge, half-natural, half-tooled cavern. At once one could see inhuman rites of an unexplainable nature had been performed within it. Bones, human and animal, were swept back against the walls, hundreds upon hundreds of varied skeletal pieces all jammed one into the other, creating a circle of bone around the center of the room nearly knee high. Tavarel explained that

there had been no time in which to remove the bones. His workmen had been troublesome enough over clearing as much area as they did; no amount of money or threats was able to convince them to remove the debris altogether.

But, more startling, more spell-binding than the bones themselves, was the object they had surrounded. An altar, for it could be no other thing, planted meanly in the center of the cavern, drew our eyes like an evening campfire on the desert. It was a beastly thing of dark origin; carved from a frightening, solid piece of red and black marbled rock, it beckoned to us all.

Even now I find it hard to put into words, but the altar was possessed of a physical presence, much beyond its mere structure as a block of stone. As we approached its surface gleamed in a way only describable as hungrily. The ground on all sides of it was a much darker shade than that on which we stood—a condition we could only attribute to its having been soaked in the blood of countless victims.

Tavarel's workmen had cut the haunting sight off from the rest of the cavern with a series of thickly wrought iron rods sunk several yards into the ground. These restraints extended upward into the ceiling, all of them seemingly as well secured in place. In the center of the wall of bars stood open a reinforced door which Tavarel headed for, beckoning to us to follow.

The nagging dread I had been feeling continued to cling to me as I stepped through the entrance, coming closer to the altar. The dampness of the cavern added to it, drawing my eyes to the puddles of condensation smearing the walls and ceiling. At our feet, we saw that the darkness around the altar was indeed that of countless centuries' worth of blood, soaked up by the ground in such quantities that at some time in the past

it must have pooled in the cavern, leaving stains on the walls nearly a foot in height.

It was that last image of brute violence which finally fired our anger. On this night, the thing that had feasted on the emotions and sanity and flesh of humanity for far too many eons, sloughing back and forth beyond the drapes of reality, dragging its bloated, evil frame with it, would be within our grasp. Somehow, without words between us, we knew all assembled meant to put an end to it, even though it might mean all our deaths.

Tavarel's voice boomed behind us, listing the means he meant for us to use in the destruction of our foe. Electricity had been harnessed for the purpose, as had many hundreds of gallons of a liquid poison—a concentrated form of death which had turned men to leather during the Great War, leaving their dried corpses behind like rotted apples on the ground of some forgotten orchard. He indicated the delivery points of each of our weapons, showing how each blow would be administered.

It was all quite clever, and there was not a man among us who was less than sure of the plan's chances for success. As we prepared to exit Tavarel's ingenious chamber, however, we discovered other forces had been planning as well.

On crossing back to the doorway through the bars, we found it closed, ourselves locked within! Tavarel struggled with the door furiously, throwing all the strength of his old but broad shoulders into the task. We all crowded around, trying to reach the lock in front, pushing, pounding, hammering at the bars with futile fury. Sudden laughter broke our attention. Looking up beyond the grill, we saw Tavarel's servant leading a host of others.

"Ketric! Explain yourself."

Grinning like an animate skull, the man stood before us looking like a sight from a forgotten time. Gone were the pinched black suit, white

shirt and small, servitor's dark bow tie. Now his gangly reed figure stood half-naked in a costume scarce imaginable.

All his body was awash in thick muddy paints—reds and greens and blacks smeared in noxious patterns over his limbs and chest and face. He wore a loin cloth made of rodent pelts, his shoulders and arms adrape in a tangle of snake skins which flapped and rustled as he walked. Those behind him were costumed in equally bizarre fashion. Where they might have come from, we had no idea, for Tavarel had always supposed himself alone in the manor with his servant.

Stepping forward, Ketric pointed a long-nailed finger at us, his yellow vulture's visage twisted with loathing. "Fools spawned of fools and a witless faith in only what you can explain! My people have fed your like to the protector since before a time we can remember. While you have admired your most modern toys, I have set the workings in motion to call forth That Which Is to come and consume you all!"

We stood, staring helplessly, frozen immobile by our seeming fate. "This place was found by no cave-in," Ketric sneered at Tavarel. "I indentured myself to you twenty years ago because we knew this day would come. We arranged your uncle's death so this land would be in your hands at the proper time—and thus ours.

"But—the time grows nigh—pray to your white god, children, for now we pray to ours!"

And then, Ketric clapped his hands, spurring his followers into action. As a group, they took what seemed assigned places, moving with an attractive and yet repugnant precision which showed more than simple practice. All the crowd, men and women, gave off a feeling of sensual brutishness. Several of them set a tune with drums and pipes, a terrifying and repelling music which sent a continual beat of madness throughout the cavern.



The rhythm of the swaying bodies grew faster. Ketric's followers danced with lashing hair and blazing eyes, spinning dizzily on their toes, leaping about the chamber, every moment building their fever to a greater height.

Oddly, O'Donnel seemed nearly uninterested. Calmly and methodically, he tore at his jacket lining, pulling the bunched cotton from within. Quietly he handed some to each of us, indicating that we should stuff it into our ears as he had done. I might have thought him mad as those beyond the bars, had no this demeanor suggested that he was instead waiting for something—what it was, I simply could not imagine. While we complied with his instructions, O'Donnel eyed our captors continually, gauging the lengths of their madness until finally he decided it was time to act.

Instantly it was made clear to me: a man much traveled in the western reaches of America, O'Donnel never went anywhere unarmed. Always suspicious of the worst, mayhap more so after Tavarel's telegrams, he had secreted a revolver beneath his jacket. Distracted by their ritual, our foes did not notice as he suddenly crossed to the doorway. Packing his jacket against the lock, he reduced it to scrap with five rapid but muffled blasts!

In truth, the noise was scarce heard over the mad dance in the cavern beyond. Ketric's followers had taken to flailing themselves—gyrating beyond control, frothing spittle mixed with blood bubbling from their lips and draining from their noses. Stepping out into the open between two poles of electric lights, O'Donnel raised his revolver, growling, "One for you, devil!"

The bullet sang across the chamber, cutting the red-fogged air, tearing into Ketric's throat. Even through our stuffed ears, the noise was hellish. The cultists' frenzied dance ceased as most grabbed for

their ears in pain. Crimson pulsed free in blowing arcs from Ketric, splashing across the heights on which he stood, and upon those below him. Clutching his neck, he held fast his throbbing jugular, clamping back the rebellious blood, shouting at us:

"Too late, Mr. O'Donnel—a grand effort, but too late! For now, nothing can stop the entrance to our world by Gol-Goroth—the forgotten Old One!"

So screeching, Ketric raised his hands to the cavern roof, his released blood throbbing over all the scene as his followers moved toward us. Rapidly fitting new shells into his revolver, O'Donnel cautioned, "Careful, they're trying to herd us back into the cage!"

Tavarel sneered. Stopping to pull a thick, wicked-looking jawbone from the heap surrounding us, he hefted it grimly, stepping forward in measured steps.

"Let them try."

So speaking, he feigned and swung, tearing the face away from the closest of the painted devils. Gory tendrils of flesh slid free as the victim's companions pushed him aside and swarmed forward. O'Donnel again emptied his weapon, the accompanying reverberations doing as much damage to the cultists as the bullets.

We all laid into them then, fighting with fist and bone, fear and desperation driving us into a berserk animation which pushed our foemen back to regroup.

Singer was already done, his thinly-haired head rent open and his eyes staring in futile helplessness. Clements had busied himself lashing a length of electrical cable about the doorway bars, trying once again to secure the cell. As his head had been bent to its work, so had ours, but now that the cultists had fled back a space, several of us had turned to look about the chamber. It was Conrad that saw it first.

"Kirowan!"

His scream was the desperation of

the walking dead—a piercing shriek that rent brain and soul like flame through gauze. We whirled at the sound, and saw as he saw, and were taken with the same madness.

Within the chamber, oozing and shifting upon the altar like some beached sea creature, lay Gol-Goroth, a sight of such horrible nature that we were fixed like birds before a snake. Its call sang to us, and we listened, each of us seeing its monstrous bulk in our own way.

To some, I later learned, it appeared as a large, loathsome toad-shape, a webbed, bloated sack of moving green which retched upon the block of stone, filling the chamber with its noxious bleating and croaking.

To others it was crab-like in nature, possessed of claws and hooves at the same time, all of it running with long strands of red jellied pus, hanging from it loosely.

No matter what its appearance, however, all stood mute and watched as it reached out from its perch on the altar, and then sent its forward appendages through the bars to wrap around Harris. It plucked him forward, smashing him against the bars, pulling him through in pieces, cramming him into its puckered maw a piece at a time.

The sight of such horror snapped something in Tavarel. Shaking his head, he turned to his side and slapped Conrad mightily across the face, spinning him from the sight in the cage. Conrad in turn freed Clemants as Tavarel moved to myself.

O'Donnel, twisting himself free, brought Beardsley around. Shaken, the group of us conferred quickly. The cultists had all fallen to their knees, their faces buried in the ground. They paid no attention to us, lost as they were in ghoulish devotion. Silently, Tavarel waved us to follow him.

Mounting the ancient carved stone stairs which led upward to his collection of devices, Tavarel plucked

up the dull-eyed remains of Ketric which blocked our path. Gripping the corpse in both hands, he hurled it from the ledge into the again approaching tendrils of the obscenity below. Gol-Goroth greedily closed on the limp form, whipping it through the air, breaking its bones to pull it between the bars.

As we all attained the uppermost ledge, O'Donnel cautioned, "Hurry up! That thing's nearly done with its ju-ju boss."

Tavarel snapped open the first restraint on a large tin. Cursing to himself, he whispered, "Then grab hold and get one of these open before it comes looking for more of us."

O'Donnel and Conrad immediately began to work on another while I assisted Tavarel with the one he had started. Beardsley worked to keep Clemants quiet. The sight of Gol-Goroth had been beyond the artist, twisting his notions of reality too severely for him to be able to function. His hair had gone shock white, standing away from his head in sweat-dripping strands like a bizarre crown. The rest of us tore furiously at the catches of the drums, hurrying to open them as Conrad shuddered, "Damn—we're too late!"

Again the snaking tentacled claws were reaching forward. At Conrad's shout, however, several of the cultists looked up, spotting us on the ledge. Forgetting about their god for a moment, they stood, several reaching for their cudgels. Doing so brought them within Gol-Goroth's red-rimmed sight, however, and they were snatched up like handfuls of chestnuts.

Their bleats of terror attracted their fellows, and suddenly the entire chamber was shot through with screaming echoes. Before anything could be done to prevent it, a dozen or so of the swarthy painted figures began mounting the stairs. Beardsley dragged Clemants upward out of their range, even as O'Donnel and Conrad



rolled their half-opened tin to the edge of the stair and then tipped it over. The heavy drum bounced once and then tore open, splashing the ascending cultists with a flood that sent them sliding away.

Instantly those covered with the freed liquid tore at their skin, howling with a pain beyond reason. And then, without warning, the seeking arms caught hold of several of the blinded cultists, dragging them toward the bloody, flesh-slimed bars. With no concern, or even understanding, Gol-Goroth happily slammed its captives to death against the bars and again began its process of dragging forth the pieces it desired.

Scarce attention could be paid it, however, as more of the howling cultists came at us. Tavarel rolled our tin forward, sending them scattering again, the death within washing over the floor of the chamber. O'Donnell took aim and fired, cutting down several more, their bodies falling and twitching in the burning moistness soaking into the dirt floor.

And then, perhaps in reaction to the noise, or perhaps in response to some long-forgotten urging, Gol-Goroth slid from its perch and moved forward. We tore at the remaining tins, opening and emptying them as quickly as possible.

Reaching the cell wall, the green bulk pondered it dully, and then began moving against it, pushing with an impossible strength. Great bulges of green flesh squirmed through the bars, stretching tight from the pressure. Tavarel shouted, "Judas! Quickly, topple all the drums! Hurry!"

We rolled the remaining tins over the edge, listening to them splash open as they hit the rocks below. By this time, the cultists had all fled the chamber screaming, their nightmarish howls long gone and forgotten. As the air began to thicken from the released poison, Tavarel flung gas masks at us, yelling instructions as to their proper fit. After fixing

his own in place, Beardsley turned to struggle one onto Clemants, but it was too late.

The artist had descended the stairs, approaching Gol-Goroth's cage. Already the bars had begun to bend, powder from the stone ceiling grinding free from the pressure. Ignoring the searing hiss which rose each time his shoes came in contact with the thin film of lethal liquid that now covered all the cavern floor, he reached forward, grabbing the end of the electrical cable he had threaded through the bars.

As he turned toward the generator, Beardsley made to cry out, but Tavarel stopped him. "It's the only way. We can't help Clemants now, but he might be able to help us." Our old friend looked down at Clemants as he began wiring the connections to the generator in the corner, and then said, "Quickly; we'd best be out of the chamber before he finishes."

Scrambling down the stairs, we dashed for the exit, trying not to watch the ever-bending bars, or the obscene, green shape staggering them. Several of the thick rods had already buckled, hanging loosely from the ceiling and jutting from the floor like the splintered fangs of some ancient dragon.

We reached the edge of the pool, getting well back into the tunnel from which we first emerged, when Clemants' voice reached us.

"Now, thing—now, we'll see." Without tremble or quaver, his normally thin voice echoed strongly. "Come, you devil! Feast on me!"

Compelled by a curiosity beyond reason, I looked back into the cavern. There, I could see Tavarel's cage now completely shattered, and beyond, Clemants standing defiantly in the poison pool, wrapped in coil from the generator. In each hand he held a sparkling live wire. As he taunted the god-thing before him, he stared wide-eyed, the slightest trace of foam brewing past his lips. Blood-smeared extensions grabbed out for

him. Smiling, Clemants dropped the wires into the poison, setting the cavern crackling in blue light.

Gol-Goroth made to drop its captive, but could not. Clemants fried away before my eyes, his body crumbling into flame and cinders. Current flew through the shambler's great bulk, the wild flying lengths of it thrashing wildly. A dark, burning stench filled the chamber and tunnel, followed by a vomitous billow of gagging black clouds.

A noise beyond human reckoning thundered around and through us. Gol-Goroth screamed in a killing, murderous throttle of tones which sent us all stumbling through the tunnel like deer in a forest fire. It was the uncomprehending wail of despair in agony—the bleeding shriek of madness incarnate, inarticulate and brutal.

We were assailed by smoke and stench and noise in quantities as to suggest that Armageddon itself had arrived. How we survived the agonies of the thing we had sought to destroy I cannot say. When I finally realized that its screams had ended, I knew they had been over for some time.

Smoke still hung in the tunnel, reeking of the smell of Gol-Goroth's burnt flesh. I staggered to my feet, throwing my arm about Conrad, dragging him upright. O'Donnel did the same for Tavarel, helping the older man to a place against the wall. Beardsley pulled himself up, mumbling beneath his breath about things I could not hear.

The tunnel lights, powered from the mansion above, were still working but dimmed by the smoke in the tunnel. Walking back to the mouth of the chamber, Beardsley peered in to view the remains of our other-dimensional foe. It was the last thing he was destined ever to do.

Without warning, Gol-Goroth's still burning tentacles whipped into view, crushing the life from our friend instantly. The sound of his breaking bones echoed rudely, chas-

ing and passing us in the halls as we stumbled blindly in terror from the thing behind us.

We ran without plan or thought, fleeing with the insane frenzy of fish in a net. We bounded from the walls, tearing our hands and faces, blood sluicing from our wounds and trailing behind us. Gol-Goroth followed.

The thing's noise gnawed at us, clutching through the tunnel at our heels. Through our gas masks, through the wadding in our ears, still we gagged with nausea at the smell and sound of the beast. Strangely, even as we ran, a tiny hurricane's eye of logic within my mind's storm-tossed panic wondered at how our pursuer could still live.

It had soaked into itself hundreds of gallons of Tavarel's poison; it had swallowed the fury of the heavens, charred inside and out until the air was heavy with the stink of its burning flesh, but still it came. Dogging us with undiminished power, it came oozing through the halls behind us, snorting at us as if to ridicule our efforts.

Blind in the smoking insanity of the tunnel, I stumbled on behind the vague form of Tavarel, wondering at what we had done. I was sure the others had the same thought as I; would Gol-Goroth track us upward into the mansion—into the outside world? Had we, in our attempt to rid the world of this occasional nightmare, brought it permanently to our plane?

I shuddered with the thought, realizing in that moment that there was nothing left for us to do. In truth, I near gave up hope then, for I had come to believe that nothing of man's science could injure, or even hinder, the rampaging bulk at our heels.

And then, suddenly, the exit to the surface loomed before me. O'Donnel was already scrambling up into the manor cellar, followed haltingly by a dazed Tavarel. Conrad and I stumbled to the support rope and began dragging ourselves hand over hand to the surface. Clambering up through



the shattered flagstones, I saw O'Donnel, smashing open numerous of the packing crates which sat about the chamber. Tearing free his gas mask, he roared:

"Take Tavarel upstairs—quickly! We've one last chance to halt this damned thing, and I've the mind to take it."

Offers on our part to assist him were met with mad snarls. O'Donnel screamed at us to go, and then turned his back on us. Breaking the old abandoned war crates apart, he scattered blasting powder about himself in all directions, his black mane whipping arcs of sweat into the air with every swing.

Afraid to interfere with his plan, aware that the madness of our ordeal had affected us all, I took Conrad by the tattered edge of his sleeve and pulled him to where Tavarel lay, heaving great ragged breaths in and out. Each taking an arm over our shoulders, Conrad and I lifted our friend to his feet, practically dragging him up the stairs.

We staggered up and out into the main hall, all the three of us carrying the others. Upon reaching the foyer, I told my comrades, "Keep going! Outside! Get away!"

They sought to restrain me, but I escaped their grasp and plunged back into the house—my brain refusing to yield even one more human being to the monstrosity below without making it pay dearly. Whatever O'Donnel's plan, he would not face Gol-Goroth alone.

Upon reaching the stairs to the cellar, however, I found he had no intentions of facing the thing at all. His rational, fighting instinct had taken over, cutting through the shock and insanity of what we had seen to force him to proper action. As I started down the stairs, I found him starting upward, dragging a large burlap of blasting powder behind him. Shaking the last of it free, I watched him reach into his pocket and pull forth a small match case.

But before he could strike one, he looked forward into the cellar, and suddenly he froze. Without thinking I knew Gol-Goroth had ascended from the tunnel.

Knowing O'Donnel to be in the thing's power, I dashed back down the dark stairwell, somehow shoving aside my fear, realizing only that the world's one chance was to be weighed by my actions. Grabbing my friend's arm, I swung him away from the cellar and then struck him as sound an open-hand blow as I might, staggering him back a step. As his eyes began to blink, I shouted: "Don't look at it—don't think, O'Donnel! Just act!"

Reacting from instinct, he struck the match still frozen in his hand and then dropped it into the heap of powder mounded at the base of the stair. Instantly the doorway filled with the harsh black of hissing powder sputter. The obscene presence of Gol-Goroth disappeared from view as the blanket of explosive grains ignited, flame racing throughout the cellar. O'Donnel and I reeled headily up the stairs, pulling and pushing each other as we went.

As we topped the landing, we could hear the thing's form scraping at the stairwell, seeking to rise behind us. Giddy with desperation, the pair of us ran for the front door; O'Donnel's hand took the knob of it as the first explosions rang free.

We were thrown to our knees—then to our faces. Plaster sprang from the walls; the chandeliers came crashing. Smoke curled through the floorboards. Dragging each other up, we pushed open the doors, a rush of wind from outside beckoning the flames beneath us upward into the walls.

We hurried onto the porch, able to see Conrad and Tavarel awaiting us in the distance. We stumbled for the stairs, but then, even as safety called to the fore, some mad impulse caught me, damning me to stop and look backward into the burning bulk of Dagon Manor.

More explosions rocked the mansion,

but they could not turn me from the draggling horror of Gol-Goroth, now covered in dark slag and ruin, moving through the hanging, serpentine billows of smoke toward us. Noxious tentacles flung themselves forward, and I felt my doom nearing, only to be plucked from such an end by the fruition of O'Donnell's plan. Before that shape of elder blasphemy could enfold me in its living web, suddenly the floor buckled beneath it, a rushing grey scorch of fiery destruction consuming the horrific terror as it fell back into the cellar below.

Taking the chance offered, I flung myself from the porch, hitting the fen beyond with an impact which shattered ribs, but saved the rest of me. For, in that instant, the greater part of the explosives which lay beneath Dagon Manor shattered the mansion's massive boulder, ripping open the night with an explosion of untold force. All of us were thrown like so many leaves in a gale across the carpet of grasses toward the road beyond.

Flaming board and glass showered us; brick and stone sent skyward as if by cannon rained on the countryside, some bits coming down more than a mile away. Flame raged across the sere grasses, wildly shot by the force of the main explosion, only to die quickly against the soaking muck of the fens.

Little trace was found of our

friends' remains. Their bodies perished in the holocaust, as did those of Ketric and his followers, and that of their god. Gol-Goroth did not return to its foul altar, nor did it live through the night. Bits and pieces of it were discovered over the days that followed. Where it fell, life died out. Ponds were poisoned, fields rendered barren—but the thing was no more, and would never come again.

From our recovery beds, Tavarel and I, both done some injury during the explosion, learned that O'Donnell and Conrad had tracked down all the torn scraps of Gol-Goroth and consigned them to the pyre.

In the end, we had proved to be nothing more than men, and Gol-Goroth nothing more than beast. At times, delirious in morphine dream, I have questioned whether our struggle and the resulting loss of life was worth our efforts. In more rational moments, however, I remember the heaps of human bones surrounding the thing's altar, the thousands of crushed and bloodied breastbones and skulls of women and children, and the dark red stain in the yards of ground we stood upon, and the answer comes quite clear.

[Howard's fragment ends with "And I knew Conrad shared this feeling" on page 16.]



## Satan. Walks at Midnight

by Gary Lovisi

Of course, the story I'd heard had been only local rumor—the kind of thing whispered about by old maids for years and years—stuff used to frighten little kids who were disobedient. Of course I thought it was all a crock. However, the residents of this small mountain valley really believe in the rumors about the old bog and say it is the one place on Earth where Satan walks at midnight.

When I told Doris, she's my wife—we've been happily married now for almost ten years—at least happy on and off, if you know what I mean—Doris just laughed it all away.

"They really believe all that stuff?" she said in that wry tone of hers, her eyes full of moisture, big pupils, alert senses—mind as sharp as a knife.

"That's what they say. As far as

I can tell no one in town even goes near the old bog," I replied, lighting a cigarette, seating myself next to Doris on the sofa, my hand slowly working its way down her back, unclasping the buttons of her blouse.

Deftly she slapped my hand away with a teasing gesture and a, "Not now, Joe. I want to hear more about this bog—it sounds like just the sort of thing the boss could use in the Sunday Supplement when we get back home."

Well, I tried to look suitably chagrined, but really wasn't all that much; we could always get it on later, and besides, I was pretty curious about that old bog myself.

"Old Jasper Mulrooney, at the General Store, says the bog is very old and very deep, and over the years has gotten bigger and bigger. He says



that some scientists from the state university measured it as growing about a yard each year. He remembers that it was only about twenty yards wide when he was a young boy, but now it's tripled in size and is still growing. Funny thing is, no one can figure out why or how it keeps growing like that. They say—and Jasper said he got this straight from an oil company geologist—the bog is made of a carboniferous crude mixture that acts like quicksand to drag things in and downward. In some ways it's a lot like the LaBrea Tar Pits out in California. Jasper says that over the years quite a few people from the area who have traveled out that way have mysteriously disappeared. It's assumed that somehow they fell into the bog and are lost somewhere within."

Well, Doris just clapped her hands and her eyes focused full of interest. "What a great story! Joe, I want to get out there."

"Sure, baby," I said.

"I mean now, Joe."

"But it's dark, baby, and anyway I want to . . . you know."

"Do all men have such one-track minds?" She laughed, and I had to remind her about last weekend, when we'd first come out here for a vacation and rest, and how she'd practically sexed me to death.

"That was different." She smiled, and her tongue drifted across her luscious red lips, very, very slowly. Remembering.

"Oh, I see."

Then she gave me one of those pretend pouts. "Really, Hoe, I think we should take a ride out there and see this for ourselves."

"At night?" I asked incredulously.

"Sure. Fact is, this is the best time. You're not scared, are you? I'll be there to protect you."

"Thanks," I managed to reply. And so much for being nice and comfortable and looking forward to an interesting evening of bedroom activity—

Doris had gotten my lazy behind up and out the door, into the car, and we were now driving up the long road that led out of town to where the midnight bog was located.

On the drive out I told Doris the rest of what I'd heard about the mysterious bog—the rumors that circulated around the valley—the reasons for all that fear which kept the people away from that part of Spring Creek.

"What a story, Joe. This is turning out even better than I expected. Can you see the article I'll write up on this—the hell with the city—this'll get me into national magazines! *Life*, and maybe even *People* magazine."

"Well, that's what the people say about the bog—they're all scared to death because they believe some kind of creature lives inside it, deep down beneath all that top sludge and tar—and that at midnight it comes out looking for food."

"And they say the creature is the devil himself?" Doris asked quietly.

"Something like that. Anyway, they say it's a thing that lives down in the deepest hell—in the deepest section of the bog. None of the locals will even go near it."

"It'll make a great story, Joe," Doris said, all excitement now as she looked at her watch. It was 11:00. "We've got just enough time."

"Yeah," I said, but I wasn't very enthusiastic about it as I turned off the road and looked out at the huge expanse of bog that stretched before us in all directions. It was a large area of flatland: dark and bleak, foreboding in the extreme, rimmed by tall weeds and a few scraggly bushes and saplings. The bog itself looked black, like tar, and seemed to ooze a putrid thickness as it shone dully from the light of the overhead moon and stars. And it was very, very quiet all around. No frogs croaked, no crickets chirped, no nothing at all. Apparently there was no life

in the area to make any sounds or noises such as one normally hears on any country night. The only thing, everywhere one looked, was an eerie blackness, which totally engulfed the area once I turned off the headlights of our automobile.

"Sure is a spooky place," I said, and I could now feel my bones shaking a bit from the cold night air. Or was it just the cold of the night air?

Doris just nodded. I could see that the area was getting her down; it was an eerie location, just the kind of place one reads about where bodies are regularly dug up from horrible murders and mutilations. It was the type of place where you could be killed and no one would ever know about it. I could see that Doris was a little nervous as we drew closer, and that this might be just a bit more than she had bargained for in coming out here at night.

"I think it would have been better to come out here in the morning—then we could see whatever there is to see a lot more clearly," I offered, not mentioning how nervous the area made me feel. With just one wrong step you could become engulfed in a horrible quagmire for which there could be no hope of succor. Then you'd sink down into that black mush of decay; slowly, yet inexorably, being drawn down ever farther to cold dark death waiting underneath. It was a very cruel way to meet one's maker—if in fact that was who you would meet within the bog!

"I think you were right, honey," Doris said quietly, and this surprised me a bit: "I don't like it out here; it gives me a real bad feeling."

"Anyway," I added, trying to cheer her up with a rather faint-hearted attempt, "it's almost midnight and nothing's happened—maybe we're just letting our imaginations run away with things?"

"Yeah, I guess there never was anything to fear about that stupid old legend." And she laughed it off and so did I, and we both looked out

over the flat level plain that made up the bog and felt a little better. But that feeling of relief didn't last long, for out on the bog I saw a sight that sent the blood in my veins freezing in terror!

It had been a vague outline at first, and I'd naturally thought it to be a small bush or tree branch stuck in the bog; but as I looked more closely I noticed that it had five small branches at the tip—and they looked remarkably like fingers. And they were moving! Very slowly, but rhythmically, opening and closing and seemingly accompanied by the sound of loud moaning—as if the very dead themselves were waking and coming back to life. With curiosity getting the better of my fear, I left Doris and moved up to get a better look, now straining my eyes to make out what was nearly indistinguishable in the darkness ahead.

"Joe!" It was a scream from behind me, and as I turned I saw Doris in the grip of two black-shrouded figures, hulking brutes that had grabbed hold of her and were roughly dragging her down towards the road.

"Oh, Joe! Help me!" were the last words she managed to shout as one of her abductors had knocked her unconscious, or maybe she had fainted from the sheer terror of her predicament. It all had happened so fast, the two figures had so quickly spirited her away, that by the time I realized what had occurred it was too late.

I screamed, "Doris!" and ran after her almost immediately, but before I could move a dozen feet I felt four vice-like hands upon me—holding me back—dragging me helplessly to the cold hard ground. And though I fought like mad to be free, I couldn't get away. I ended my struggle altogether when I heard the unmistakable sound of the hammer being pulled back on a revolver and felt the cold metal of the open barrel shoved hard between my eyes.

"One move, and I pull the trigger," a gruff voice said, and I knew he wasn't kidding. I tried to crane

my neck to see where they'd taken Doris, but now everything was black and quiet out in the distance.

"That's better," the guy with the gun said. Then he and another man rolled me over and frisked me very expertly, and I knew then that they had to be private dicks, police detectives, or maybe even feds.

"No weapons," one of the pair announced to his partner, the one who still held the gun on me. By now he'd also taken out my wallet and was busy looking through it. I thought it an inopportune time to protest about this violation of my rights. It wouldn't have done any good anyway—and probably would only serve to make them mad.

"ID says he's Joe DeSanti, from Pittsburgh," the wallet-rustler said to the other.

"So, Mr. DeSanti, from Pittsburgh, just what in the hell are you doing way out here?"

"Who are you guys?" I was able to whisper, which is about as loud as I can talk with a gun to my head. "What do you want?"

The guy with the gun only shrugged, as if this were one of the petty annoyances of his job. "We're with the FBI. We've had a tip that something's happening here today. And now, Mr. DeSanti, I want you to tell us just what your role in it is."

"Where's my wife!" I'd found my voice now that I knew they were feds and supposedly on my side. But were they on my side? "What have you done with her?"

A bone-chilling fear took control of me as I noticed the blank looks on both men's faces. It didn't take me long to put two and two together and to come up with the horrible conclusion that neither of these men knew anything about Doris' fate at all. And if that was true, then who the hell had carried her away?

"My wife! Doris! She was with me not ten minutes ago—over there by the car—two men, they dragged her

off! They weren't your men?"

"Ah, no. And we didn't see any-one until we spotted you," the guy with the gun said. Finally he lowered his weapon. "All right, you can get up now, and tell us what all this is about."

"I've got to find Doris," I said, slowly standing, trying to get my thoughts together. "They took her!" This last I shouted at the agents, and then in surprise answer to my plea I heard a low muffled voice from far away.

"Joe!" It was Doris, one loud scream that had somehow reached my ears. I called back but received no reply, but it was enough to let me know that she was still alive and close by, and even more, it verified my story to the FBI men so that we could all go after her. And I knew, I just knew, where that voice had to be coming from!

"It's my wife, she's out there on the bog. Those guys dragged her there. I think there's someone else out there, too. I saw a body."

Both agents now drew their revolvers and followed my lead out into the blackness of the night.

It was an impenetrable darkness, the scant light from the moon now totally obscured behind thick swirling clouds, a black barrier that prevented all illumination. Everywhere were the gnarled and twisted stubs and weird shadows that seemed to dance madly in that mysterious landscape.

"Follow me," I said, trying to lead the way as best I could, through that maze of darkness and danger toward the bog pool. "And watch your step; the blackest areas are where the bog is deepest and most dangerous—one wrong step and you can sink to the bottom within a matter of minutes."

"All right," one of the agents muttered while his partner scanned the interior of the bog, drawing our attention to a spot that looked, in the shadows, like a stump with long



roots stretching out on either side.

"I saw it move, Sammy," the first FBI man said to the other. "It could be an animal trapped in the bog . . ."

"Or it may be a man," I concluded, and we carefully made our way to the bog edge and saw that it was, in fact, a man. Weak, bedraggled, immersed in the inky blackness of the bog up to his waist—and ever so slowly sinking downward moment by precious moment.

Finally he saw us and cried out, "Oh, thank God! Please help me! Whoever you are, you've got to help me!"

"Okay, buddy," Sammy said, "we'll have you out in a minute. Ed, you wanna get the rope out of the trunk?" But by this time Ed had already gone to get the rope, and now Sammy and I turned to the trapped man.

"My partner's getting a rope. We'll have you out pronto." Sammy tried to say it in a comforting tone but it just sounded like he was grilling a stationhouse line-up of thugs and has-beens.

Regardless, the man in the bog muttered, "God bless you!" and then added quickly, "Please hurry!"

"Who are you?" I asked the fellow. I was anxious to get out of there myself and find Doris, but there was no way I could leave anyone to die in that horrible bog. I noticed that even as we talked he was slowly sinking downward. Where was Ed with that rope? "So how did you end up in this mess anyway?" I added with a shrug.

"My name is Cyrus Spaulding." He said it with a bit more confidence, as if it meant something—it did! Even I'd heard the name. He was a big city lawyer, just made D.A., and had vowed to crack down on mob activity.

"It's that gang from the city, Louie Arachi and his goons—first they tried to buy me off, then they tried to threaten me. Now they're drawing their last card—murder! They threw some other poor devil in first

and made me watch him go under, then it was my turn."

I now realized this must have been the struggling form I saw earlier. Spaulding and the hoods must have been behind some bushes, invisible to me.

"Why the bog?" I asked. "Why drag you all the way out here? Usually these guys set up a contract, get a torpedo, and then just clean up the mess afterwards. I mean, the mob was never known for its subtlety."

"Out here I just disappear, down into the bog, nothing to worry about, never heard from again, and there's no evidence left over. It's all neat and clean and no questions asked. I believe that the Arachi mob has been using this bog to get rid of their unwanted troubles for quite a few years—it wouldn't even surprise me if they're the ones who made up all those tales about creatures coming up from the bog at midnight so as to scare away the locals. It certainly is a brilliant idea, one worthy of Louie Arachi, and seems to have become an almost perfect body disposal system for his mob. At least it seems that way from where I'm sitting. Which isn't what I'd call fun. Do you think you could get me out of here now? I feel I'm slipping down faster."

It was just then that Ed came over with the rope. There was an audible sigh from Spaulding as we all pulled him out of the bog and onto dry firm land.

"Thank you all. God bless you," Spaulding said after he'd regained his composure and vainly tried to clean the muck from his clothing.

"Mr. Spaulding," Sammy began, "Ed and I are with the Bureau. This is Mr. DeSanti. His wife is missing out here somewhere. We figure it's the same two who took you on this one-way ride. Do you know where they could have taken her? Is there a shack nearby? Do you know the location of their car?"

"I think their car was off that way," said Spaulding, pointing in a vague northeasterly direction. We followed him through small thickets, tall reeds and saplings, and finally into a small depression where we could see the two hoods, one holding onto the struggling form of Doris, the other laboring and cursing under the opened hood of their car. Somehow the marsh water must have gotten into the works, and it wouldn't start.

Sammy called out in a hoarse voice, "FBI! Drop your guns or you're dead men!"

The warning didn't do any good; we all had to duck for cover as a dozen furious rounds of hot lead blasted into the trees and shrubs that were behind us. They took this opportunity to run for cover among the bushes and vines.

"They're getting away!" I shouted, my feeling of desperation rising. "Doris!"

In reply I heard a rather muffled, ragged, "Joel!", and then silence.

"We're coming, baby!" I shouted back, and with Sammy, Ed and Cyrus Spaulding at my heels I chased after the two hoods. They were pretty big lugs, yet they managed to make good speed and still drag Doris between them as they swapped potshots over their shoulders with Sammy and Ed.

Using guns that were a bit more than your standard FBI issue, Sammy and Ed were matching the hoods slug for slug in a heated battle that crashed against the stillness of the area. I prayed they wouldn't hit Doris! I then noticed that in all the confusion, the hoods had somehow gotten their bearings messed up—they were heading straight into the deepest area of the bog!

I tried to shout a warning to Doris, though I should have realized it would have done no good, since she was still a helpless captive of the two mobsters. Then Sammy grabbed my shoulder. "It's all right! They'll run smack into the bog, get caught

like flies on flypaper, and we'll just fish 'em out. Your wife will be safe, a little bit dirtied, but safe."

Well, it seemed like a good enough idea, and I sure couldn't come up with a better one. Right at the edge of the bog Cyrus Spaulding held us back.

"Easy, boys," he said. "This is as far as we can go. I think you'd best unfurl that rope of yours now."

From a little ways ahead of us we heard yells of terror and helpless rage from the two mobsters. Mixed within that tumult was the horror issuing from Doris' shattered voice—for all three had fallen into the bog and were being quickly absorbed within.

After a few moments I could see that only scant shoulders and frantic arms were as yet free—here the bog worked very fast indeed. I knew that within another minute or two all three would vanish beneath that mass of tarry soup—sinking lower and ever lower—asphyxiated.

"Doris!" I screamed. "We'll get you out!"

Ed already had the rope and hurled it toward Doris, but it was a short throw and the rope had to be reworked and thrown out again—wasting valuable time that Doris didn't have to waste.

"Try to move away from them!" I yelled, for I noticed the two hoods, both frantic for succor, now trying to go after the rope. If they could, they would take it away from Doris and leave her to die. I tried to tell this to her but she didn't seem to notice the hoods' movements or my pleas—instead she only continued to scream with such terror and wild abandon that I feared for her very sanity. She was yelling out something, something quite unintelligible, yelling it over and over again, screaming it in mindless rage and panic. I was at this point convinced that the events of the last hour had

brought down her mind. And then I saw that Ed's latest fling of the rope had been a bull's-eye shot, the tip of the rope cracking like a whip against Doris' face. It would give her a nasty black and blue later on but at least it had gained her attention, acting as a slap back to reality—and for an instant she stopped her mindless panic and held onto the rope as the four of us used all our strength to pull her out of the sucking mire of the bog. It was a hard job, since the suction was amazingly powerful. Once free, of course, she was covered with the black tarry sludge of the bog, and was shaking violently, not fully sure that she had been saved—but she was safe at last, and I held her tightly. I took Sammy's jacket and wrapped it around her, hoping it would help hold in some of her bodily warmth, and then led her to a small boulder and carefully sat her down. I spoke to her in a soothing tone, "It's all right, baby. It's all right now; you're out and safe. Just calm down and rest."

Doris just cried and cried as I tried to soothe her, and always in between she'd mumble something over and over again that I couldn't catch. Once she said, "Oh Joe, oh Joe!" and then she continued to mumble and shake. It had me worried, almost more than when she was fighting for her life in the bog, if possible.

I told the other guys, "I'm gonna get her out of here. I'll take her up to the car and then to the hospital."

Sammy turned to me, "Hold on a minute, we still have those two to get out. We'll need a fourth man. Come on over here and give it a haul."

I sure didn't want to, but since Doris was out of it now and relatively safe, I could afford to help the other two—not forgetting for a minute that they were the ones who had started all this trouble in the first place.

I looked at the two hoods; they didn't seem so tough at all now. They were pleading, thrashing, and sinking into the bog, all the faster for their frantic flailing. Their voices were horrible to hear, a constant cacophony of curses intermixed with a sickening gurgling as they began to swallow the fatal slime. I've never seen such terror articulated by human beings before. You'd have thought their panic would have subsided once they saw they were to be momentarily rescued, but it actually seemed to grow worse!

Ed's throw was a good one this time, right on target, and like starving rats to dinner, the two hoods grabbed the lifeline and clung with the strength of desperation.

"Ready, boys?" Sammy said. "Let's pull this garbage in."

Then Sammy, Ed, Spaulding and myself, all pretty powerful men, pulled together, putting our backs into it, to drag those two hoods from the bog. And damned if we could do it!

"I can't understand it," Ed said, completely dumbfounded. Then we felt something that shocked the hell right out of us—it was an answering pull—*from the other end of the line!* Light, barely perceptible, yet definitely there—it was even, strong and finally irresistible. It was growing in strength! We found ourselves in a tug-of-war with—we knew not what!

"What the hell's going on here?" Ed said. "We're losing them!" By now the thugs had to be dead; they had vanished completely beneath the surface and, of course, would no longer be holding the rope. But *something* was!

We all stared as if hypnotized, oblivious to the rope burns on our hands as the rope began to be drawn more rapidly and inexorably through them.

It was Sammy who broke the spell. "That's crazy! It's the damn bog, this stuff sucks you right in. It's worse than quicksand!"



I just nodded nervously, for now a very cold chill gripped me as I watched the end of the rope disappear beneath the surface. For a long time afterwards there was shocked silence full of deep and dark thoughts.

"I ain't never seen anything like it," Cyrus Spaulding said. "It was as though there was something in there . . ."

"Ah, shut up, will ya," Ed barked, and we could all see his anger was an ill attempt to cover his own fear and to put to rest questions and speculations that no one could answer—or wanted to answer for that matter.

From behind me Doris spoke. She was standing now, and I could see that some of the fear and shock had gone out of her—and yet, there was a kind of haunted presence that lurked behind her eyes. She stared at us all as if in a trance, calm, cold, detached, yet with a very intense determination.

"Oh Joe . . ." Now she loosened up and became her old self again as the tension dissipated in a flow of tears and sobs. I moved over to hug her and comfort her as best I could, but she said she'd be all right and that she had to say it—she had to get it out. "There is something in there! I felt it, Joe! It came up from somewhere below and grabbed my ankle—it tried to drag me downward. I could feel its cold harsh touch, feel it pulling me frantically. *Hungrily.*"

"Ah," Sammy interrupted, his tone of voice showing that he really didn't believe what he was about to say next. "It's just the bog, miss. Bogs are like that."

"I know what I felt!" Doris coun-

tered angrily. "Something is in there and it grabbed me, and it took those two men!"

Cyrus Spaulding dispelled the mood when he broke out with a belly-laugh: "Well, that old rumor says that Satan walks at midnight in this bog, and by my watch it's now 12:15, so I'd say he's just about on time!"

This didn't draw a very favorable reaction either, so Spaulding got serious and added, "Come on now, really—I mean this was just a body disposal site for the mob—nothing to get all excited about." Once more he tried to laugh it off but no one would join him, and after a few lame attempts he gave up and said, "So, you know it doesn't really matter what we think, that's now it's going to read in my report. You two fellas should handle this the smart way, too."

Sammy and Ed, the two FBI agents, nodded at Spaulding and shrugged. "Yeah, I guess you're right, Mr. Spaulding," Sammy said. "No one would believe us anyway—except the local crackpots."

To my surprise, even Doris turned to me and said, "Joe, let's get out of here and go home, and if I never hear another word about this place it won't be too soon."

"But honey, what about the article? The Sunday Supplement? The national newspapers?"

Doris just smiled at me and said, "Joe, if you want to read about it, you'd better write it yourself."

And I did! But you know, I always did wonder afterward just what might be there, way down deep in that bog. But, luckily, now Doris and I will never find out.



## On Voodoo

by Hugh B. Cave

A while ago I attended a voodoo service in Haiti at which a writer of Sunday features for American newspapers happened to be present.

One doesn't often find outsiders at an authentic voodoo service. Getting into such a gathering is difficult without personal contacts, and the real thing usually takes place too far from the capital to be convenient for people spending only a short time in Haiti. There are "ceremonies" offered in or near Port-au-Prince for tourists, of course, but these are little more than folklore presentations staged for money. Real voodoo is a *religion*, concerned not with tourists but with the invocation and worship of gods and spirits.

The service mentioned was in the seaside town of Petit Goave, about 45 miles from the capital on the South-

ern Peninsula. Rural slums line both sides of the main shopping district. The land is flat and dusty, except when the wet-season rains transform it into a chocolate pudding that smells rather cozily of donkey droppings. Many of the town's buildings are typically old-style Haitian, two-storied, unpainted, with wrought-iron balconies. Not the most pleasant country town in Haiti. Nor was the gentleman in question the most pleasant of visitors.

Obnoxious in the extreme, he got into trouble first with his arrogance, then with his camera. A guest at a voodoo service is not expected to whip out a camera and start taking flash pictures any more than one at a church service in, say, New York would be expected to do so. Certainly not without asking permission

first. Then because the gentleman spoke no Creole and could not understand what he was being told, he became even more arrogant and was asked to leave.

Probably nothing much would have happened to him had he refused. In five years of residence in Haiti and many return visits I have met very few violent Haitians. But he did leave, and later wrote a rather long article about what he had witnessed. A friend, happening to see it, sent me a copy.

In this story our writer described the ritual dancing and singing at the voodoo service as "a wild sex orgy." The simple offering of a chicken as food for the gods was called "an unholy animal sacrifice," with so much about blood in it that his readers must have expected the newspaper page to drip all over them. Worse, he completely missed a really dramatic event that took place before his eyes.

(Though he and I were the only non-Haitians present, I hadn't attempted to explain anything to him. He had come in late and seated himself across the peristyle from where I was, and then he began brandishing his camera. I thought it wise to keep my distance lest I be thought, by Haitian friends present, to approve of his behavior.)

The service was one to Cousin 'Zaca, the patron loa of the peasant farmer. Normally this means a rather uneventful evening with touches of country humor. Some fellow is possessed by 'Zaca and, with a colorful sisal handbag draped over one shoulder, goes through the motions of sowing seed. (There isn't space in an article of this length to describe any voodoo service in detail; all I can hope to do is supply a touch of color.) My point here is that a *second* possession soon took place at this service, and arrival number two from the world of the spirits was the redoubtable Gèdè Nimbo, more often

called Papa Gèdè, the guardian of the cemetery.

Now Papa Gèdè is Death, and he is at all times a jokester, which is why he often comes uninvited to a service. He likes to strut around with two cigarettes in his mouth, a top hat and black coat on, and an outthrust hand eagerly tickling female bottoms. His favorite libation, almost always awaiting him in case he does show up, is a first-distillation rum called *clairin* in which red-hot peppers have been steeped for weeks until it's fiery enough to sear the gullet of a granite statue.

So while our gentleman of the press was furiously taking pictures of the drummers, the dancers, the farmer who'd become Cousin 'Zaca, a boy about eight years old, sitting next to me on my bench, became possessed by Papa Gèdè and took off like Michael Jackson!

I had been talking to this boy. He had come with his mother from a home in the hills a few miles away. His name, he said, was Ti Bagay—obviously a nickname, for it means Little Thing. He was so pitifully frail that he looked as though an ounce or two of anything alcoholic would probably kill him. Keep that in mind.

When the loa mounted him—took possession of him, that is—the lad leaped to his feet with a wild yell and raced to the *poteau mitan*, the sacred central post at the base of which gifts are offered to the gods. As it happened, the *houngan* (priest) and his assistants at this service were people of foresight. Among the offerings was a bottle of Gèdè's favorite pepper-spiked raw rum. Originally the bottle had held a fifth of Haiti's marvelous Rhum Barbancourt, and it was full.

Also available for Gèdè if he came were a top hat, cigarettes, and matches.

When Ti Bagay slapped the hat on his small head, only his protruding



ears kept it from thumping his shoulders. He stuffed two cigarettes into his mouth and lit them with a flourish. Snatching the full bottle of spiked *clairin* off the concrete slab at the base of the post, he thumbed the cork out and began prancing around the peristyle.

As I've told, Papa Gédé delights in pinching female bottoms. To Bagay pinched away with equal enthusiasm. Gédé gulps down his favorite drink—which, by the way, when mixed this way, is called in Creole a *trompé*. Ti Bagay gulped it down, too.

He emptied the bottle. And all the time he was doing this, our reporter with the camera was so busy with everyday *other* things that he couldn't see a genuine voodoo mystery unfolding before his eyes. Because Ti Bagay did not get drunk. Oh, he staggered a bit—perhaps as much from the speed of his dancing as from the *trompé*. And beads of sweat literally flew from him as he danced. And his eyes rolled at times. But he emptied that fifth of raw rum spiked with red-hot peppers and became neither drunk nor ill.

It should have killed him, medics have told me.

When the bottle was empty, Ti Bagay returned it to the base of the post, took off his top hat and coat, and calmly walked into the sacred *hounfor* at the end of the peristyle. But in just a few minutes he reappeared, returned to his place beside me on the bench, and sat down.

"Ti Bagay," I said, "do you know what you just did?"

He didn't. He was not even aware that he had left the bench. When I enlightened him, he at first seemed astonished, then delighted, that Papa Gédé should have chosen him. He said he had never been possessed by a *loa* before.

The service over, I made my way to the *poteau mitan* and picked up the *trompé* bottle from which the boy had drunk. There were a few drops of the fiery rum left in it. I poured them

into my cupped hand and touched my tongue to the stuff, just to make sure. For hours afterward my mouth was on fire.

Now if our gentleman of the press had written about *that*, instead of about "sex orgies" and "unholy animal sacrifices", he might have told his readers something about voodoo. But my hunch is that he already knew what he was going to write before he ever got to the service, because he'd been reading what others like him had written and was too mired in his own preconceptions to respond to the unexpected.

He wasn't the first, of course, He won't be the last.

For one thing, the observer who can't speak or at least understand Creole cannot possibly understand what goes on at a voodoo service. Could a visitor from Outer Mongolia comprehend what goes on at a Georgia camp meeting? And along with a knowledge of Creole, a background in African and Haitian history would be a help. Voodoo came from Africa in the slave ships, and the Creole tongue of today's Haitian peasant evolved from slavery as well. Coming from many different African tribes, those ancestors of today's peasants had no common language. Creole is a result of their efforts to find one by imitating the speech of their French masters.

So to get anywhere in voodoo you must live long enough in Haiti to learn Creole and then use what you have learned to become accepted and trusted in voodoo circles. But Creole is such a fluid tongue, and varies so much in different parts of the country, that learning it is no easy thing to do. My good friend Sister Joan-Margaret of the School for Handicapped Children in Port-au-Prince has an amusing tale she tells. To raise money for the school, which was founded and is run by the Episcopal Sisters of St. Margaret, she talks to various groups in the U.S. and elsewhere. Almost invariably someone in

an audience will ask her to "say something in Creole, Sister, please!" How many non-Haitians, after all, have ever heard Creole spoken?

Sister Joan's stock reply is, "So ou vlé'm di?"

"What does that mean?"

"It means 'Qui sa ou vlé moin dit?' but no one ever uses all those syllables."

"But what does that mean?"

"It means, 'What do you want me to say?'"

But with or without Creole, almost every scribbler who has ever visited Haiti seems to have felt an urge to write about that country: its politics, its poverty, its spectacular scenery, and above all its mysticism. Hence the lurid voodoo stories filled with copycat stock items, many of which have crept into assorted horror flicks dealing with that subject and in earlier days were echoed in pulp fiction about voodoo. (I confess to having authored a couple of such pulp tales myself before I ever set foot in Haiti, but I've been trying to make amends ever since!)

Anyway, I have extracted a handful of such exaggerations from newspaper clippings and pulp tales in my files. Here they are, with a few comments:

1. *Sticking pins in voodoo dolls to torment or kill an enemy.* I've attended many different kinds of voodoo services in Haiti's villages and mountains and have yet to see a pin stuck in a doll of any kind. Small dolls depicting the various loa are sometimes found on *houmfor* altars, but these are used in ceremonies. If anyone *does* stick pins in dolls for evil purposes, it would have to be a *bocor* (sorcerer) and he would do so for a fee. The *bocor* has about as much to do with true voodoo as a devil-worshipper has to do with Christianity.

2. *Sex orgies.* This may be sadly disillusioning, but there is very little sex in voodoo. Erzulie, the love loa, when possessing a female participant at a service, may command

the sexual attention of a chosen male. This is a form of sex, no doubt, though ritualistic rather than orgiastic. But any other sex that takes place is likely to be between young couples who slip away from the festivities for fun and games of their own in the surrounding darkness.

3. *Bloodthirsty animal sacrifices.* Chickens are frequently killed as food for the loa. Sometimes their necks are wrung; other times their heads are cut off; occasionally they are seized by the neck and whirled around the whirler's head at high speed. In two of the newspaper clippings from my files the writers claim to have seen *houngans* bite the heads off chickens. Well, my dictionary says there are certain carnival people, called geeks, who "perform sensationally morbid or disgusting acts, as biting off the head of a live chicken," and I saw it done once at a "ceremony" for tourists. But—sorry—I've never seen it done at an actual voodoo service.

Other animals sacrificed are goats, sheep, and bulls, though the latter are too valuable to be used in any but very special services. I once attended what is probably the most secret voodoo service of all, the annual week-long affair called *La Souvenance*, held in a special fenced-in village in the foothills near Gon-aives. This service is so special that only *houngans* and *mambos* (priestesses) attend it, and having once checked in, no one is permitted to leave until the week is over.

At such an affair one would perhaps expect the most esoteric of sacrifices, but the only unusual animal I saw offered to the gods was a large ram. I did, however, see the rare *assator* drum played—this one was more than eight feet high and was played by men on ladders!—and I met a possessed old Haitian who claimed to be Moses and talked fluently for half an hour in what I think was Hebrew.

4. *Nakedness.* This crops up time

and again in stories about voodoo. Naked dancers flinging themselves about in a frenzy are stock characters, it would seem. Well, I'm sorry. I've seen and photographed any number of naked peasant women washing themselves and their laundry in country streams (you first talk to them and make friends), but not once have I seen anyone naked at a voodoo service. The trend is just the opposite: to flowing white robes for the women and gaudy costumes for the men.

5. *The voodoo spell or curse.* Again I say maybe. A friend of mine who taught English at the College St. Martial in Port-au-Prince once let me examine a hand-lettered volume compiled by a fellow priest whose forte was botany. This man had spent years collecting Haiti's medicinal plants so that he could describe and do watercolors of them. There were 383 such plants listed, and most were poisonous if taken in large enough doses.

Your *houngan* or *mambo* knows most of these plants and can employ them in such a way that a curse or spell might seem to have been cast upon the recipient. Really, though, that isn't voodoo. It comes under the heading of witchcraft or sorcery again, and the *bocors* who practice those dark arts are loners. Zombies, for instance, are a product of the *bocor*, never of the voodoo *houngan* or *mambo*.

6. *Human skulls at voodoo "ceremonies."* Where, oh where, do these writers see such things? I've been in all parts of Haiti. I walked across the wild, roadless mountains of the Southern Peninsula—a grand adventure that provided background for *Legion of the Dead*. I rode muleback through the equally wild and roadless Massif du Nord—which provided background material for *The Evil*. I wore out four jeeps exploring the country's back roads. A study of voodoo was part of all this. And not once have I seen a human skull at a voodoo service. A bovine

skull now and then, yes. And sometimes skulls of goats. But never a human one.

7. *People dancing barefoot on live coals.* Yes, sometimes. But more often the people who do this are walking, not dancing, and appear to be in some kind of trance. Some Pacific Islanders perform the same ritual. But some voodooists are able to do an even more impressive thing that our people of the press don't seem to have caught up with yet. They build a fire of charcoal, plant a tall iron bar like a crowbar in it, wait for the bar to become white hot, then grasp it in bare hands and parade around the *tonelle* or peristyle holding it above their heads.

Incidentally, at a *brulé zin*, which is an initiation service for those about to become *houngans*, the initiates go through an even more remarkable ritual. To describe this service would take thousands of words. I did so in *Haiti: Highroad to Adventure*. But in the end there are seven iron cooking pots full of oil, with fires blazing under them. The initiates are required to proceed slowly from pot to pot, dipping their right hands in each. Something they have acquired through weeks of meditation and preparation prevents the boiling oil from stripping their hands to the bone, but what it is I don't know.

8. *The mad, frenzied dancing.* Give the movie-makers a black mark on this one, along with the writers. I don't recall the names of the pictures, but at least three times I've sat through so-called voodoo movies in which the dancing was atrociously unvoodoo. Fact is, all the dancing at a voodoo service is ritual dancing and much of it is slow. The only time I've ever seen "frenzied" dancing was once, in Quartier-Morin near Cap-Haïtien, when more than a dozen spectators appeared to become possessed at the same time. It was probably some kind of mass hysteria, and even so, it wasn't as wild as what



some of our teenagers indulge in.

9. And finally, child sacrifice. We should at least mention this because so many sensation-seeking writers seem to feel they have to. The facts? One of the very first books about Haiti discussed the sacrifice of children at voodoo "ceremonies." I threw the book out of my library years ago because it contained so many errors; therefore I can't turn to it now to determine whether its author claimed to have actually seen a child sacrifice or merely heard about one. I tend to remember he got his information secondhand, as he did nearly everything else in his book. Later writers copied him, of course. Anything as sensational as that was bound to attract the titans of titillation. But I have never heard even a whisper about child sacrifice from anyone in voodoo, and I doubt it ever happened.

If I seem to be overly defending voodoo here, perhaps a bit of summing up is in order. Voodoo, again, is a religion. This doesn't mean that all *houngans* and *mambos* are saints, any more than all Protestant ministers and Catholic priests are saints. Unquestionably there are *houngans* and *mambos* who engage in extracurricular activities for whatever they can get out of it, though the Haitian peasant certainly hasn't much to be fleeced out of.

But Haiti, remember, is a poverty-stricken country with few doctors, and most of those are beyond the peasants' reach. Take away the *houngan* and the *mambo*, with their handed-down knowledge of herbal medicine, and the country people would have no one to turn to when sick. Then take away the voodoo *loa* to whom they look for guidance in just about everything that touches their lives, and they would feel abandoned. That's the

right word: abandoned. Few outsiders seem to understand this.

*Editor's Note:* Hugh Cave's *Haiti: Highroad to Adventure* has been called by novelist Kenneth Roberts "the best book on present-day Haiti ever written" and by others "the best report on voodoo in English." Bill Pronzini, in his *Voodoo!*, says: "Of the dozens of works about West Indian voodoo, perhaps the most authoritative and objective are Hugh B. Cave's *Highroad to Adventure*, etc. . . . [and] Cave's *The Cross on the Drum* is a first-rate study of the conflicts between Christianity and voodoo . . . containing a considerable amount of voodoo lore, as does Cave's recent macabre tale of voodoo and zombecism, *Legion of the Dead*."

Other Cave books dealing with voodoo are *The Evil* and *Shades of Evil*, available now in bookstores.

We asked Hugh which of the books on voodoo (other than his own, of course) he would recommend. He replied:

"For a study in depth of voodoo itself I would suggest Milo Rigaud's *Secrets of Voodoo*. Milo is a member of the Haitian elite. I attended a number of services with him and was awed by the extent of his knowledge. Odette Menesson-Rigaud, his wife, is an expert photographer, responsible for most of the authentic photographs of voodoo that find their way into print.

"For the music of voodoo the books to go after are *Haiti Singing* and *The Drum on the Hoe*, both by Harold Courlander. Both contain music and words (English as well as Creole) to voodoo chants, along with definitive lists of voodoo *loa* and detailed descriptions of some of the services. Courlander has made some authentic recordings of voodoo music, too."

## Reviewer's Rack

R. Dixon Smith, *Lost in the Rentharpian Hills: Spanning the Decades with Carl Jacobi*. Bowling Green University Popular Culture Press, 1985. 146 pp. \$8.95 paper; \$17.95 hardbound.

Popular Culture Press is indeed a friend to the latter-day pulp fiction fan. In the last couple of years PCP has published four collections of pulp reprints: *Dan Turner, Hollywood Detective; The Defective Detective in the Pulp; Sensuous Science Fiction; and Hollywood Troubleshooter*. Now two more valuable volumes have appeared: Jaffrey and Cook's *Collector's Index to Weird Tales* and R. Dixon Smith's *Lost in the Rentharpian Hills*. Though the obscure title, derived from the opening lines of Jacobi's early classic "Mive," might tend to throw off the uninitiated, the book is a biography and bibliography of veteran pulpster Carl Jacobi.

Fans of Jacobi in particular or of the pulp era in general will find this tale well worth the telling. Much of Jacobi's life seems to have been marred by sorrow, most of his satisfaction stemming from his remarkable success in writing and selling pulp fiction in many genres. And Smith's book ably introduces us both to Jacobi's life and his work.

Some readers will find interesting Smith's discussion of Jacobi's brief dip into the Cthulhu Mythos in his "The Aquarium," arbitrarily purged of Mythos references by editor Derleth for inclusion in *Disclosures in Scarlet*. In this and other stories, Jacobi created a shelf of evocative occult titles, including some used recently by Brian Lumley: *Hydrophinnæ, Dwellers in the Depths*, and the startling *Unter Zee Kulden*—a title jarring in its implications. What

kind of a cult would or could meet undersea? Another in the same vein is *I Am a Werewolf*, a title that might sound pretty silly but which upon second thought catches you up wondering if the rumors of lycanthropy have finally crystalized into an outré confession, confirming your childhood nightmare fears. Well, so much for illustrating the eerie atmosphere of Jacobi's work. No one familiar with his tales will need examples.

The book contains many helpful features including a set of letters to Jacobi from fellow pulp superstars like Howard, Cave, Derleth, and Smith. And fellow small press editors take note: Dixon Smith has been good enough to provide an annotated bibliography including submission and publication histories for each story (!), including those never finally published. You will, dear reader, be seeing some of those in these pages.

Cornell Woolrich, *Vampire's Honey-moon*. Carroll & Graf, 1985. 223 pp. \$3.50.

Omniscient pulp archivist Robert Weinberg has chosen for this collection four of Cornell Woolrich's *Weird Menace/Strange Detective* tales. "Graves for the Living" is pure *Weird Menace*. The title story is a supernatural horror yarn. "Streets of Jungle Death" is more of a *Strange Detective* story. Also included is "I'm Dangerous Tonight." This book is a must for fans either of Woolrich (many of whose other works have, happily, recently been reprinted in paperback) or of the *Weird Menace* field in general.

Peter Haining (ed.) *Zombie!* London: A Target Book, 1985. 224 pp. UK £1.60, Aust. \$4.50, Canada \$3.95, NZ \$5.95 (in America, you might check with Robert & Phyllis Weinberg Books).

Peter Haining further enhances his reputation as a horror anthologist and puts us deeper in his debt with this latest collection of variations on a theme. Haining and Michel Parry have produced a number of volumes that make it easy for those of us who like to go back to the sources of our favorite literary and cinema horrors. *Zombie!* assembles just about all the important stories and even a couple of non-fiction pieces, such as W. B. Seabrook's "Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields." Included is the article that formed the basis and inspiration for Val Lewton's film *I Walked with a Zombie* and August Derleth's "The House in the Magnolias." Video and cinema horror buffs will especially appreciate Haining's introductory survey of zombie fiction and films, listing such

classics as *Bowery at Midnight*, *Revolt of the Zombies*, and even *Zombies on Broadway*.

Haining briefly mentions a couple of theories about the origin and possible basis for the zombie legend. Unfortunately he wrote just before the publication of the recent research which proves that zombies do actually exist, not of course as revived corpses, but as victims of Haitian voodoo shamans' secret death-simulating paralysis drugs! The victims, usually guilty of some ritual infraction in the voodoo cult (see Hugh B. Cave's "On Voodoo" elsewhere in this issue), are actually buried and exhumed before they can asphyxiate, then given mind-numbing drugs and set to work as blank-eyed slaves in the cane fields. (For further details, see "Zombies: Do They Exist?", *Time*, Oct. 17, 1983.) This whole schema was accurately anticipated in the 1932 film *White Zombie*.

Such are the scientific realities behind the zombie "legend", but for the literary sources of the zombie tradition check out *Zombie!*



## NEXT TIME . . .

Keep your eyes peeled for more loathsome literature in the next issue of Shudder Stories, including these gems of degeneracy: "Bride of the Tree-Men" and "Coffin Crag" by Carl Jacobi; another offering from a new writer in the old tradition called "Doomed Maidens for Satan's Brothel"; an unpublished weird menace yarn by Manly Wade Wellman; and an article by Will Murray! Plus the standard stomach-turning art work!

Till then, don't get caught by anyone whose respect you value while reading an issue of Shudder Stories!

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"Rails of the Yellow Skull" by Carl Jacobi  
"Satan Walks at Midnight" by Gary Lovisi  
"Dagon Manor" by Mrs. P. M. Kuykendall

"On Voodoo" by Hugh B. Cave  
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